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"THE SCHOLAR AS PREACHER"

(FOURTH SERIES)

THE GALILEAN ACCENT

THE GALILEAN ACCENT

BEING
SOME STUDIES IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

BY

ARTHUR JOHN GOSSIP, M.A.(Edin.)

"The best of God's servants are those who, when seen, remind of God."

MUHAMMAD

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TO

THE MEMORY OF

ROBERT GOSSIP

WHOSE HEART WAS AS A LITTLE CHILD'S

AND OF

MARGARET GRIEVE GOSSIP

IN WHOSE FACE I SAW GOD'S

"Whatever may be thought of the genuineness or authority of any part of the Book of Daniel, it makes no difference in my belief in Christianity; for Christianity is within a man, even as he is a being gifted with reason; it is associated with your mother's chair, and with the first remembered tones of her blessed voice."—COLERIDGE.

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Note.—Two of the above, "How Christ won through," and "How Spring comes to the Soul," have appeared in *The Expository Times*, and are reproduced with the kind permission of the Editors and of the Publishers.

"The bystanders said, 'To be sure, you are one of them too. Why, your accent betrays you.'"

MATTHEW xxvi. 73 (Moffatt).

"Observe yourselves in your actions, and you will find to what sect you belong."

EPICTETUS.

"Here was a man, bustling, striving, organizing, speaking and preaching with the dust and fire of the world on his clothes, but carrying his shrine with him everywhere."

LORD ROSEBERY on Chalmers.

"What Mr. Alexander Scott is reputed to have said many other hearts will respond to, that ever after he knew Mr. Erskine, he never thought of God but the thought of Mr. Erskine was not far away."

Principal SHAIRP on Erskine of Linlathen.

THE GALILEAN ACCENT

I

THE GALILEAN ACCENT

"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."—Rom. viii. 9.

THE Galilean accent was not pretty. Indeed, in cultured circles up at the capital, there were many trite and well-worn jests about its boorish and uncouth rusticity. But, whether beautiful or not, an accent can't be hidden. The broad Border "o's" and "a's," the quick clipped Cockney speech, the hurt tone of complaining in the average Glasgow voice, are unmistakable. And, in those days, a man from the north had only to ask a simple question in Jerusalem, and his slurred gutturals and queerly swallowed syllables were shouting Galilean after him in everybody's ears.

When the flames suddenly leapt up that night, and, though at once he shrank back nervously into the shadows, the maid's eyes most unluckily caught sight of him, and kept coming questioningly back time after time, until at last she challenged him, Peter, startled and badly scared, might pour out his hot flood of passionate denials. But the thing was futile on the face of it. For, with every word he uttered, others kept turning in his direction, and began to cluster round him. That northern tongue of his was betraying him sadly, was jeering all his voluble protestations out of court as a thing frankly incredible.

"Oh come, come!" laughed the constables. "Why, man, you speak the dialect
He uses in His answers: you can hear Him up the stairs.
So own it. We shan't hurt ye. There, He's speaking now! His syllables
Are those you sound yourself when you are talking unawares."

The Galilean accent would not hide.

And no less certain is it, so the New Testament reiterates, that if any one really belongs to Christ, his Christianity cannot be concealed. Whether he professes it or not, inevitably it must out. All unknown to the man himself, the whole tone of his mind and views, a certain something about his way of living life and in his outlook upon men and things, will keep blabbing it abroad. If any one have not the spirit of Christ, declares Paul bluntly, he is none of His. And where that spirit is, it will show itself continually in half a score of little, perfectly unconscious tricks of Christlikeness in almost everything that the man says and does and is. In short, his accent will betray him.

Dr. Moffatt, towards the close of Ecclesiastes, sharpens a phrase, that had lain blunt and pointless, into a little glancing flash of genius. "They put," says the Preacher, speaking of the writings of old, "they put the mind of one man into many a life." Could there be a more satisfying definition of the function of literature, of that subtle wizardry whereby thoughts, called out, ah! how long ago, by some passing incident—the glory of a summer morning that swiftly clouded over, the laugh of a girl that quickly died away, some little instance of the pathos of these lives of ours, no one remembers what—are not dead, though their authors have for centuries been lying in forgotten graves, but are alive in our minds still, so that even yet we feel the stab of that old sorrow, and their song sets us singing now, and we to-day are braver because they once pulled themselves together and faced life and its difficulties unafraid, find in these thoughts blown to us from another world the final and complete expression of what lies deepest in the most secret places of our

souls, of those indefinable wistfulnesses, of those home-sicknesses of spirit which we too know but for which we could never have found adequate words. "They put the mind of one man into many a life." But even more arresting is that as an almost perfect definition of Christianity. Where will you find a better? For what is it, this wonderful faith of ours? What is it here to do? Is it not just precisely this, to put the thoughts of one wonderful Mind into many lives until we look out through Christ's eyes, feel with Christ's heart, will with Christ's will, not only speak, but think and act and live, with His very accent.

That is the ideal. And so long as we are only struggling and contorting ourselves to do what is still foreign to us, things are not wholly well. Only when to think in Christ's way has become as instinctive, and spontaneous, and natural, and unconscious as the dialect of one's native place—and who ever notices his own accent, or is so much as aware that it exists?—only when in Paul's phrase we have put on Christ's mind, and made it our mind; only when, as Hardy says, the thing slips out, unnoticed by ourselves, when we are "talking unawares," are we fully Christian men and women. "The kingdom of heaven is not come even when God's will is our law," says George Macdonald, "it is fully come when God's will is our will," when our minds ring in perfect and spontaneous unison with it.

There lies the explanation of a somewhat puzzling matter in the Gospels, namely this, that people seem to be judged by Christ so arbitrarily, to be tested finally by some little point that lies altogether out of the main current of their lives. Dives, as we call him, had surely a right to have his business books examined, and his home life considered, and his character as a whole passed under review. Is it not less than fair that he should have to stand or fall by such a trifle as his attitude to a beggar whose stance happened to be in the neighbourhood of his office or his house! Why, asks Christ? And indeed a little thing can be the most drastic

of tests, for we are most ourselves when we are off our guard. Aristotle maintained that you can know a high-minded man even by the way in which he buys a toy for a child. And Plutarch, that wonderful biographer, held that the lesser things are usually more revealing than the formal and official acts of a man's life, that a chance and unconsidered saying can often let you see farther into his heart than his set public speeches. You do not need a long harangue in order to discover a man's accent. And then he may be speaking carefully and not quite naturally. Half a dozen casual words, let fall when he is in his slippers, will enable you to know with certainty whether he hails from London or from Aberdeen. When those panting Ephraimites reached the Jordan, and were stopped by the guards there, "Are you a Gileadite?" they were asked. And if they answered, Yes! "Say Shibboleth," it was commanded, and they said Sibboleth, for they could not frame to pronounce it aright. It was a petty trifle over which to lose one's life, yet the test was not arbitrary, but sufficient and final. In our own old wars, had a fugitive been ordered to say loch, and called it lock, what further proof would have been needed that, with all his protestations, he was no Scot, as he claimed? The little turn of speech, unnoticed by himself, had made that wholly clear. For never a Scotsman born of woman talks like that. So, all unconsciously, as we move to and fro about our lives a hundred little nothings we ourselves never observe are dropping from our hands that keep betraying accurately whose we are and whom we serve—God or the world, Christ or our self. The quite unconscious accent of our life makes it entirely certain whether we are Galileans, or are not.

"In our family," says Gibbon about William Law, "he had left the reputation of a worthy and pious man who believed all that he professed, and practised all that he enjoined." Some of Law's opinions he thought ill-considered and impossible; but the man's life, lived there from day to day in the same house as they, had left not a doubt in their

minds that here was an indubitably Christian man. The thing was obvious, because he had the Galilean accent.

What then is that? This beautiful thing called Christ-likeness, of what does it consist? Montaigne tells us that always at the end of a book he wrote a little note on the impression it had made on him. What would you set down at the close of the Gospels as a pithy summary of the main features of the wonderful Figure who meets us there?

What first struck His contemporaries in Him was a certain sunny-heartedness. That was the reflection on His life and mind of His absolute trust in God; and it made His days glance and glitter, like waves shimmering in the sunshine, with a happiness that proved uncomfortably dazzling to some weak eyes.

There were people who did not altogether like it; who felt it to be not quite seemly in a professedly religious man! But for Christ nothing else was possible. He had found God so lovable and so entirely dependable; His grace toward us is so tireless and ingenious in devising new kindnesses on our behalf—never a morning dawned, so Jesus learned, but endless little opportunities of serviceableness had been cunningly opened up for Him—God's care of us is so wise and sure that Christ found life a very good thing, and He said so frankly. Often we are allowed to overhear Him at His private prayers, and what strikes one is the enormous space thanksgiving holds in them; though, curiously enough, it has no set place at all in the prayer that He taught His disciples. To us His life looks bleak and shivery and windswept, yet He was always blessing God for something; and so perfect was His obedience, that where you and I would have whimpered, or, at best, schooled ourselves to accept with lips bitten hard lest we cry out, Jesus was full of gratitude. When, for instance, it became evident that the religious authorities and the important people generally would have none of Him, we, in His place, would have gone to God to pray for strength to meet that bitter blow without loss of faith or honour.

But no shadow blew across Christ's mind. His acquiescence was a gladsome thing; not, as ours often is, a stunned surrendering to superior power, largely because we must, like an unwilling child, who, if not actually pouting, drags slow, reluctant, heavy feet. "I thank Thee, Father, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." "He took the cup," that Symbol, dreadful in its vividness of what He saw was coming, and there is never a tremor in His hand or in His voice, but He gives thanks. Praise was the native language of Christ's soul. And, whenever He was deeply moved, or found Himself alone with God, He fell back into it again unconsciously. In His mind there is nothing of that note, so marked in our devotions, of querulousness, of impatience, of hot, angry upbraiding, of an unseemly beseeching God to think again, and this time far more wisely! It never even occurred to Christ to doubt God, or to question the love and wisdom of His ordering of things. He did not, indeed, always understand. Three times, at least, He was staggered and uncertain. And He talked it out with God, telling Him frankly that He was not sure what He was meant to do. But when He became sure that this or that was God's will for Him, He rose up at once and went into the densest blackness, unafraid. "And they feared as they entered into the cloud," we read and can understand, remembering how we, too, have shuddered as that chill gripped our hearts, and all life's sunniness grew overcast and grey. Yet, says the poet, facing it undauntedly, "Yet the dark, too, is God." And Jesus met the sorest ills of life still reverent, still worshipful, still grateful.

And when we ask from Him the secret of that splendid valour with which He faced His grim-looking life, of that glorious quiet-heartedness of His that makes us look and feel so fussy and flustered, and hot and perspiring and small, He answers that, for any one who really knows God, nothing

else is even conceivable. It hurts Him that we are so fretted and over-anxious. To Him that seems insulting to God. "O men," He once sighed, taken aback by it, "how little you trust Him!" And indeed we do. To doubt the fact of God in a world so full of Him seemed to Christ a pathetic blindness; but to know of Him and yet be worried and fretted and careworn, that was real unbelief, and it struck Him with a kind of horror. He could never grow accustomed to it. If you really knew God, He kept saying to the uneasy, fussing people round Him, your hearts too would be filled with the healing hush of a great peace, yes, even in this hazardous world of ours so full of uncertainty and trouble; and yours would be the joy of children, who know they have a Father to take care of them, and that they do not need to bother about things, but can quite safely fill their days with care-free happiness. That is the Galilean accent, the spirit of Christ.

And genuine Christians do acquire it. They have quiet eyes and steady pulses; they face life with cheerfulness and a brave intrepidity; they are bigger than the rest of folk. Tolstoy declared that he became a Christian because he noticed that they met life and its rigours and surprises with a peace and joy no one else shares. And that is true.

But what of you and me? Do you think that any one coming on us would go their way saying a little wistfully, "There is a strong man, calm and unafraid, not flustered by untoward things because so very sure of God, who does not often talk about Him, but who quite certainly does trust Him, and is obviously leaning hard against Him in the living of His daily life?" Or are we, with all our Bible reading and churchgoing, just as fidgety and cross as others? Browning, in that wonderful poem, describes how Andrea del Sarto, the faultless painter, took his soul into his hand, and looked at it, and turned it round, and set it down at last contemptuously as a poor, flawed thing. He knew that in some ways his work was better than that of the biggest of the others, that he could

draw more accurately than even Raphael, could paint with a careless, opulent, almost negligent ease to which, with all their toiling, they could not attain. And yet he felt these bunglers were by far greater than he. For he stood outside of his work, apart from it; his soul was not put into it, nor did it come into his soul, while they

> "Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me;
> Enter, and take their place there sure enough,
> Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
> My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here."

So we do see the beauty and the wisdom and the seemliness of faith in God; we talk about it often and admiringly; we feel that that is how a soul should bear itself when face to face with sorrow; we agree with it all heartily in theory. And yet when any actual trouble breaks in on us are we then, when the pinch comes, as strained and worried as the rest of folk? Does our faith, just when we need it, fade somehow into nothingness, and leave us as peevish, as cross with life, as ill-tempered towards God, as those who make no secret that they do not like Him, or think Him unjust? Our thoughts are nearer heaven, but we sit here, as hot and ill at ease and nervous as those round about us. Perugino's pictures rank next to Fra Angelico's for piety, and yet the man himself was earthy, sordid, hard; and our religion also does not seem to get into our life. If it means anything whatever, the spirit of Christ includes a brave and happy trust in God, that can sail out into the storms of life with a high heart, that meets the howling of the tempests and the slapping of the billows unafraid. And if we have not learned that, then we lack the accent, are not really Galileans, protest how we may, but hail from quite another kingdom; and our speech unconsciously betrays us.

Again, no one can think of Christ at all without His gallant unselfishness rising up before him, that eager and unwearied sympathy that was literally sympathy, for He ...ally hurt by others' troubles, could not stand unmoved

outside of them, but had to come into the raw sore heart of them, and share them. And everybody came to know that, and flocked eagerly to this Man so original in His use of life, who put His own to none of the recognized ends, who gave Himself the smallest place in it, who threw it away with a queer, happy zeal for any one in difficulty or who wanted help. "Some one," says Mrs. Besant, "ought to do it, but why should I ?" is the ever re-echoed phrase of weak-kneed amiability. "Some one ought to do it, so why not I," is the cry of some earnest servant of man, eagerly forward-springing to face some perilous duty." Between these two sentences, muses a wise thinker, lie whole centuries of moral evolution. Ay, between them is all the far distance between Christ and us !

Santi Deva, the great Buddhist saint, declared that what is wrong with the world is that we all make self the centre round which life revolves ; that we think for self, and act for self, and live for self. Now, said he, I am going to cast out this self, and put the love of others in its place, will make my life revolve round that, will henceforth think for others, act for others, live for others, making them my self. And is not that bold ideal a speaking photograph of the actual daily life of Christ ? The Galilean spirit means to have a shoulder ready for our neighbour's burdens, a life at the disposal of those in want or need, a mind that has time for others, even for those who seem to have no claim on us, or who on their side have been thoughtless and unjust ; for it is not for nothing that when people speak of showing a Christian spirit they mean a forgiving one. That was what used to strike them in Muhammad, that however busy he might be, if any one came to him in distress, he always gave them all his eyes, and all his mind, and the whole of himself for so long as they needed him. That in itself is a great and a most healing gift. And Christ, too, always gives us the whole of Himself for as long as we need Him, as if He had no other thought in all the world but us. But when others turn to us, are we not apt to be a little rushed and somewhat fidgety

to get back to our own business ? Tactfully we begin to edge away ; our eyes wander ; quickly we get outside of the thing again, and with a hurried word of sympathy are off, leaving them there to bear it the best way they can. For, after all, luckily it is their affair, not ours. But Christ always lets us see that our affairs are His, that He is in this with us, and that we can draw on Him until we have exhausted Him, which is impossible. While we ? oh, we are kindly enough people ; but it is with the surplus of our time and means, with the small change left over after our own wants have been adequately met. There is not much self-sacrifice. Rather our thoughtfulnesses are apt to be crowded into the notes at the foot of the page, to lie outside the real plot and story of our life, are inserted like that breathless Wandering Willie's Tale which appears out of nowhere, suddenly pitchforked into *Redgauntlet,* and at the end of which the interrupted and much duller pages of the main novel are resumed.

Borrow was once lying on the deck of a Spanish vessel, and heard the captain ask another man how many languages he spoke. " Just one," said he. " Then that will be the Christian one." For so, says Borrow, they call Spanish. " Yes," said the man, " I speak Christian. And that fellow lounging yonder can speak Christian too, when he so cares ; but the truth is, he is just as much at home, or more, in the gibberish of the Moors and the gipsies."

We can speak Christian when we choose. But we are more at home in the gibberish of other things—the world, and selfishness, and pleasure, and our own poor little comforts, and the like. We do know a little Galilean. But it is not native to us. We don't think in it, but obviously are translating across into it, and often introduce queer alien idioms uncouthly enough, like the barbarous Arabic that has spoiled Persian, can be self-centred even about spiritual things and selfish even upon Calvary. We haven't the real accent, speak it stumblingly and painfully, with many a slip, like

foreigners. And yet, says Paul, till we have learned Christ's spirit, we are none of His. It is not optional that we should bear our fellows' burdens, not something that the best of us can do and the rest leave alone, and be no worse for that. It is a law; and Christ lays it on all His people, expecting their obedience.

Still further, there is our Lord's brave hopefulness. No one ever had so valiant a reading of things. No one ever was so certain that spring and the glory of the daffodils would be upon us very soon when others, shivering and wretched, looked for nothing but long months still of winter's gloom and mud and howling sleety tempests. That tired, apathetic, beaten feeling that steals over us at times, that faithless conclusion that there is no use trying further, that things are far too dour and crabbed ever to be straightened out, but must remain much as they are, is foreign to Christ. We allow ourselves to be tamed by life, grow broken, unexpectant, disillusionized, drift with the times as being the only thing that we can do. But He feels that in the same world with God anything may happen; and He will set no limit to what that may be. Always there was a certain glorious fervency of spirit about Christ, a brave yet queerly childlike thrilling of expectancy. A door opens, and we look out and see only a dull, muddy, unexciting little lane. But Jesus' eyes are shining. He is looking at a road that leads to the world's end and to the rainbow's foot! Some Greeks ask to see Him, and before His mind rises the sure prophecy of the whole earth eagerly crowding toward Him: a thief cries to Him from the neighbouring cross, and He knows that the devil has been conquered, and that God has won! Boldly He goes to the most hopeless-looking and impossible people and startles them out of themselves into a better life by the sheer daring of His hopes for them, and the glory of His faith in them, and the audacity of His unquestioning belief in the hugeness of what He is quite sure they are prepared to give and do. He looks across a world which, in His part of it at least, had

peevishly flung away from religion, and, like our own day now, had put any real faith of betterment it had into politics and economics and such things, while as for religion—oh, it talks and talks, but it does nothing! And no doubt church-people were discomfited, telling each other sadly how evil the times were, how grave and grey the outlook, how sadly different it had all grown since they were young. But Jesus remained undismayed; saw hope in that unspiritual time—in the unrest and heaving of all these unquiet spirits; heard truth behind the wild and frothy talk; was sure that always when things are at the darkest, dawn is near the breaking, and that when men have turned from God, soon, disappointed elsewhere, they will be streaming back again to Him in whom alone, He knew, that they can find what can long satisfy their hungry souls. Always He kept daringly preaching hopefulness when others had lost heart; always He was inciting to sheer obvious impossibilities, which none the less somehow got done; always undauntedly He hurled His brave defiance in the face of every fearfulness, and of every discouragement, and of every despair! That was ever His audacious way. Looking at you now, beaten and down, He won't lose hope, and bids you not lose hope. Up again! up again! His brave voice rings out, for we will win yet, you and I! As Massinger has it—

> "Quench not
> The holy fires within you; though temptations
> Shower down upon you, clasp your armour on:
> Fight well, and thou shalt see after these wars
> Thy head wear sunbeams, and thy feet tread stars!"

And Christ says that so confidently to such puny, shabby souls!

That is the Galilean accent. And the first Christians caught it perfectly, and reproduced it with a valorous exactness. Let them all come, cries Paul—temptation, sin, the devil, this obstinate world, our own frail hearts, and our past failures, and the sorry mess we have made of our lives—let

them all come, and in Christ Jesus we shall face them, not only unafraid, but confident of complete victory! Ah, the brave heart! To be depressed, discouraged, downcast, beaten, is to have lost any semblance to our gallant Master. And remember, says Paul, if you have not learned His spirit, you are none of His. Up again! up again! and back into the thickest of it all once more!

That is an element in Christlikeness which the Church usually finds it hard to learn. As Petrarch tells us, he would have preferred to live in any age rather than in what he judged to be his own drab and prosaic one; so every generation of the Church is prone to think meanly and irritably of its own day, to feel that somehow God has grown less efficient than He used to be, that things are dragging sadly, that, in short, little can be expected in such dull times, so different from the great days when God was God, and things really happened. To-day, for instance, there is much talk among us of the need of a Revival, and we hang about rather hopelessly until somehow that blows in. But has it not come? Not by the familiar road that we keep watching, because in other days God used that, and not in the expected guise, still come to a generation which, while not greedy about churchgoing, and uninterested in theology, and frankly bored by the clash of ecclesiastical disputings, is none the less endeavouring with a new thoroughness to carry the practical spirit of Christianity into the din and dust and living out of the common things of daily life in every department of it. It is worth remembering that originally, and in all ages since, numbers who were eagerly watching for Christ failed to see Him when He came, because He was so unlike what they had been sure that He would be, brushed up against Him in the street, and did not recognize Him! And it is possible that, while we are whimpering in our prayers because so little seems to come of all our efforts, other ages will look back wistfully at ours, as to a time when faith must have been very easy. For God, they will say with a sigh, was so manifestly at work

in the earth then, and these lucky people—that is you and I —came on Him face to face in every dusty street on every common day!

We must not limit God to certain methods dear to us, and if He does not use them in our day, judge that He has forgotten us; must remember that, as Bacon says, in this ever-changing world, "a froward retention of custom is as turbulent a thing as an innovation"; must in our dreams and faith and hopes and prayers always leave room enough for the immense, the inexhaustible originality of God.

But if it can remember these things, ours should be an expectant age, for if there is much to make us think and not a little that looks disappointing, none the less reasons for a brave Christlike hopefulness keep rushing in on us from every side.

How, then, can we acquire the Galilean accent? That surely is the practical and all-important point. How does one gain any accent? There is only one possible way—that we live in the place: and as the people round us talk, gradually imperceptibly, quite unknown to ourselves, it will soak into us, till by and by we too are speaking, little though we realize it, in their fashion. And the one conceivable way of learning Christlikeness is to live close to Jesus Christ, is to make large room for Him in our life, to call Him often to our mind, to dwell much in His presence, and, unconsciously, His influence will tell upon us more and more, till, little though we know it, we have grown into His ways, and are more like Him than we would believe. There is no other method that will work. And therein lies a danger for our age. For our religion finds its natural expression in a rather breathless and perspiring running to and fro, a somewhat fussy doing this, and that, and something else, a more or less unresting energy. We can't be still, we shrink from quiet, we have lost the art of meditation, we don't much believe in strenuous self-culture or in prayer, or sitting in a hush with Jesus Christ where His voice can reach us plainly. "My spirit is fain for

the coolness," cry the Buddhist saints. Well, ours are not; like to feel hot, and to rush here and there. All that is best in us goes out in bustling service of our fellows, rather than in tense, expectant waiting upon God. As Whyte said grimly, "Gabriel is said to have come swiftly to Daniel while he was speaking and praying. He would need to come very swiftly indeed to most of us if he is to catch us on our knees!"

No doubt at all, there is something fine and generous about our mood. Even as a child, sang Heine, I knew God the Father, and when I reached the age of reason saw Him in the Son, but now I am a knight of the Holy Ghost, have learned that the end of religion is to ride abroad, giving my days to righting wrongs and vanquishing evils. Only, are we remembering that, not even what we do, but what we are, is our chief witness for the Master, or against Him? Are we forgetting that when Jesus Christ chose twelve, it was not that He might send them out at once to work for others, which to a certainty would have been what we would have urged, but that they might be with Him, be a long time with Him, that His life might tell upon them day by day and hour by hour, that He might put His mind into their lives, and that increasingly they might grow up, slowly and stumblingly, yet surely, into His very thoughts and heart and character and ways?

To be a Christian is to live life with Christ's accent; and that we can learn only by dwelling much with Him.

II

WHY YOU AND I ARE HERE

"In His love He chose us as His own in Christ before the creation of the world."—Eph. i. 4 (Weymouth).

THAT is a thought that is woven into the very web and stuff of Scripture. August and splendid, it runs through it like a thread of rich, if solemn, colour. A man's life is not his own, to be used as he elects ; but you and I and all of us are here, because thought out by the divine Mind for some particular purpose, chosen by God with care for some end very dear to Him, and that, apart from us, even He can never reach.

That seems a staggering claim. For, watch a crowd dispersing from a theatre, a football match, a church, and how extremely ordinary we all seem, lost there in the press of us, with nothing outstanding about us to attract the eye to any individual ; rounded, rather, like pebbles in a stream, into an unarresting conformity with one another, thinking with other folk's opinions, drifting along the customary ways, blown to and fro by the eddying fashions and conceptions of the times, helpless as scurrying leaves that rustle eagerly, now here, now there, before the ever-shifting winds, rarely possessing energy enough to live at first-hand and with some originality :

"For I was ever commonplace,
Of genius never had a trace.
My thoughts the world have never fed,
Mere echoes of the book last read,"

filling our days with a whirl and bustle of what? Petty duties in the office, or the schoolroom, or the home, which surely any one could do. And so the meagre tale of our hurrying years flashes away, and we are gone. And some one else stands in our place, and does our work as well, or fully better, while we are as forgotten as though we had never been, with all our busy hopes, with all this babble of unresting activities that seem so all-important to ourselves, with all the rush and dust and heat that crowd our too full days buried securely out of sight of all men's memories in what a small, in what a shallow, grave! A few years, and the letters on our tombstone will be moss-grown, undecipherable, or at least quite meaningless, calling up nothing to a single mind. A little longer and the whole world that we knew will be sunk deep in the utter oblivion of a past grown unimaginable, blotted out, for ever gone. Strange, muses Thackeray, that the day after we die, there will be the same crowds on the street and the usual crush at the corners, that the great world will be bustling on its way the same as ever. But we shall be out of it all!

But Scripture sets a far higher valuation on us than does our own self-pitying pathos. It will not be the same as ever, it says with assurance. For an eternal dream of God will either have grown fact, or have gone out for ever. There is something unique in every life, the dullest, drabest, most prosaic, something that even God cannot repeat. And therefore is it you are here—you, not another, because only you can carry through that something for Him. "Since this is my duty," says Royce, "nobody else in the universe —no, not God, in so far as God is other than myself—can do this duty for me. My duty I must myself do." And we were chosen for it carefully. That was what haunted Ignatius Loyola—the thought of the innumerable other beings whom conceivably God might have created in his place, but whom He rejected in his favour. Sometimes he felt that he could almost see God's hand pushing back these other

eager claimants for life and service, and could almost hear Him saying, No, not you, nor you, nor you. But when the thought of me rose up before Him, this, He said, answers exactly to what I have in My mind. And it was me He chose.

Here, too, as elsewhere, as Christ gazing far out into the mysteries and deeps of life saw and told us, "One shall be taken and another shall be left." We were taken; they were left. Till an awe falls upon the spirit: and these rejected might-have-beens, these thin unembodied possibilities we jostled aside, seem to be looking reproachfully at the sorry mess that we are making of our life, which all but was their life; to be crying to us sadly, Is that all that you are doing with the opportunity that all but fell to me? And surely I would have made more of it than that poor knotted tangle that your clumsy, bungling hands are weaving there. Yet, it was us God chose.

> "Ere suns and moons could wax or wane,
> Ere stars were thunder girt, or piled
> The heavens, God thought on me, His child
> Ordained a life for me."

"You came into existence," says Epictetus, "not when you chose, but when the world had need of you." God, says the apostle, with his heart hushed and very still, and his eyes seeing what is very far away, God chose you from the beginning.

What can we say and do face to face with a fact like that? Out at the Front I have seen boys picked for some dangerous exploit. And, before starting, they would turn aside to give some letter, hastily scribbled, or to whisper some message to be sent on to the mother or some lassie if the worst befell. Usually there was a certain strain and whiteness on their faces. But always there was a queer light and sparkle in their eyes; always their heads were carried high; always the lads were obviously proud to have been chosen for the perilous adventure. And God has chosen us to live out

something that lies near His heart. Is there no thrill for us in that ?

Long ago, on the night I was inducted to the ministry at Forfar, Whyte of St. George's, who was present at the welcome meeting, gave us a marvellous message that left me stunned, bewildered, half crushed and half ready to face anything. He pictured how from all eternity God had been thinking of that people, had foreseen their needs and troubles and temptations, had even then thought out with divine skill and care the necessary help and corrective, had before time began set Himself to the task of bringing that into being, and all down the interminable æons ever since had been toiling to work out into fact this thought, this hope, this gift of His for them, this heart that would be able to express exactly what He felt they would require, and then the speaker, sinking his voice, for he himself was greatly moved, and flinging out a sudden hand towards the new minister, whispered, "And now at long last, punctually, he is here!" And that does seem to be the scripture reading of these trivial-looking lives of ours.

And yet, that being so, can this that we are living be really all God planned, this frivol of pleasant happinesses, this round of little selfishnesses, these decent but unvalorous days ? Was this all that was in His mind, this all He sought, only to this He climbed so toilsomely through the unreckonable ages ? See, He said to Moses, and see, He says to us, that you do all things according to the pattern shown you on the Mount ! Yet, are we doing so ? Lay what God intended that your character and life should be alongside of the dull, prosaic actuality, as the stupid film runs past from day to day, and can there be any real parallel between the two ? It is not at all that the scale of our life is so tiny. Bigness is a very creaturely conception. To the divine mind is there big or is there little in our sense of these at all ? But does our life, as it runs on, look like a thought of God ?

Paul speaks with enthusiasm of some who have made a

great thing of their call by Christ, who on that glorious foundation have built a most splendid temple, stately and spacious, quiet and cool and vast, all a gleam of gold and gems and loveliness. But there are others, he concedes, who make little or nothing even of Jesus Christ, and all the untold possibilities that crowd on us in Him, who even on that august site run up only a crude and rough deal shack. And is this character that we are fashioning, this life of ours as we are living it, worthy of its foundation and its site ? Can this be a real justification of Calvary or a seemly working-out of an eternal dream of God's wonderful heart ?

Suppose that when He thought of this amazing earth and all the glory He felt that He could create upon it, the yearly procession of the seasons, winter's austere beauty and the gallant hopes of spring, the lavishness of the summer and the wistfulness of autumn, the sky, the sea, the moors, the forests, the brown laughing burns, the grace of woman, the strength of man, the light on children's faces, these wonderful human hearts, with their splendour of endeavour, of achievement, of love and service and self-sacrifice—yes, even Jesus Christ ; suppose that with all that before His mind, and after endless ages, He did manage to create a world out of that thin and tenuous fire mist, stuff so impalpable as hardly to be there at all, did actually see it spinning there through space a real and solid world, did somehow breathe on it so that upon its surface life appeared, and there emerged one toadstool, let us say, and then something went wrong, and nothing further happened, but the world designed for such high uses, the result of such long toil, wilted, withered, died, and all the enormous possibilities toward which He had been travelling so long, and which seemed almost won, went out in an utter starless blackness of dead hopes, would not that have been pitiful ? And is this all there is to show for all the plans, and all the hopes, and all the wonders of divine skill and workmanship that went to the fashioning of you and me—these earthy, tempery,

touchy natures, these stupid and un-Christlike characters and ways? Surely God meant that we, like Christ, should make a sheen of glittering glory out of the mean little nothings that make up our days. And there is only this to show! To be chosen of God out of all creation for something that He wishes to have done, and fail, were not that tragic! Ah! must we not be up and doing, with a far larger purpose, and a far ampler hope, and a far bigger ambition, humbly and gratefully seeking to justify God's daring trust in us, and to work out that dream of His that He has deigned to put into our fumbling hands and most frail keeping, wakening every morning with the eager thought: How can I be of use to God? How can I help my fellow-men and women? How can I make the world a better, happier place with this new day that has been granted me? making our own what, says the *Theologia Germanica*, is the longing of every enlightened soul, "To be to the Eternal Goodness what his own hand is to a man," always there, and always ready to respond instinctively with ever-growing skill and deftness to the slightest wish and moving of God's holy will. It was for His own high and august purposes God made us. And shall we squander on the squalor of mere selfishness lives fashioned for such lofty ends, and hearts designed by God to be His fellow-labourers, to carry through for Him what without us can never be! "Wherefore," says the greatest of the Stoics, "the wise and good man, remembering who he is, and whence he came, and by whom he was produced, has no end but to use his life with due obedience to God. Dost Thou still wish me to exist? I will exist. Hast Thou no further need for me? I thank Thee and obediently depart. Set me down where Thou wilt, do with me what Thou choosest: I have no will but Thy will. Let such thoughts be ever nigh you, by day and by night; write them and read them, keep speaking of them, meditate upon them, ask every one you meet to help you nearer them. For that is the real end of life."

But there is more than that—far more. For, say the Scriptures over and over, if any one is a Christian, you, for instance, it is not because you found Christ, but because Christ found you; because somehow He picked you out of the mass of folk as one of whom He felt He could make something—much as Michael Angelo at the quarries chose out this block or that of marble because, rough and unkempt though it looked, and was, to his artist's eyes there were glorious possibilities in it no one else could see. What are you looking at? they asked him once. For he was gazing fixedly at a rude lump. "An angel," he replied. And the angel was there, imprisoned in the deadness of the uncouth stone until his cunning fingers liberated it—still there. And it was so Christ looked at you. In you, too, He saw wonderful possibilities. If I can chip away the roughness, and I will, He thought, out of that dour lump of a character, I can bring forth My heart, My mind, My ways. And, with that, His eyes lit up and His face kindled. And He chose you. It is true, of course, that the whole point of the Gospel is that it is offered eagerly to every one—yes, that it is thrust and obtruded with an obstinate persistence that won't accept refusal however often that may be repeated, however coldly it may be rebuffed, however stolid and indifferent to it folks may have proved. And we must pause to underline that heavily, or we shall get ourselves, as many wiser souls have done, into a hopeless tangle. Everything that Christ has is free to any one with any taste for it and Him. Unworthiness is no disqualification, but rather a claim, He can't resist: to have no plea that will go into words or even thought is in itself to His mind an unanswerable plea. It is not for nothing that the central rite of Christ's religion is not a fast but a feast, as if to say that the one indispensable requirement for obtaining a portion in Him is an appetite, some hunger, is to be without what we must have and He can give. And in Christ's heart there is a place for every one who cares to come, a place prepared and waiting for

them, whether they come or not; a place that, if they do not come, must remain empty. For no one else can fill it; no one else will do instead of you with Christ. Let us be certain about that. Christ called Himself the door. With us a door means something that is made to shut—yes, to shut out, that is there precisely to cut off a little portion of the world all for ourselves, to make it ours exclusively, to warn every one else that here there is no thoroughfare nor right of entrance, that beyond this is private—ours, not theirs. And, seeing the door shut there in their faces, people turn back. And there are passages in the Gospels in which a door does clang to with an eerie sound of dreadful finality that reverberates awesomely through our shuddering souls, passages that speak of chances gone for ever, of opportunities let slip, that can never return. "And the door was shut."

Yet, characteristically, when Christ's generous nature thinks of a door it is of something made to open, to let in, to share, to give admission to whoever cares to come. I am the Door, and through Me you can pass into everything I have. When He comes, knocking at ours; often it is closed; and, though we hear that urgency of His, we pay no heed. But what poor creature ever made shift to hirple to Christ's door and found it shut? Always it is wide open, back against the wall—a constant invitation. Not grudgingly, not to one here and to one there, does He dole out His gifts, but flings them broadcast with both prodigal hands.

When that great scholar, A. B. Davidson, came, a poor student lad, shrinking and shy and sensitive, to Aberdeen, at first lonely and homesick, he used to steal out of his bare room and roam about the unknown streets, would sometimes stand and look in hungrily into a lighted room where some family were gathered, and envy them for all that happy homeliness they took for granted. And then some one would pull down the blind. And, shut out, he would slip away, with the night surely even blacker, colder, lonelier than it was before. But no one is shut out from

Christ, or denied anything He has. If you want it, you can have it—it is yours.

None the less, while all that is blessedly so, those who do close with Him always feel that what really happened was that, as they brushed past Him carelessly enough, He looked at them, and paused, and looked again, and turned and followed them, with that same something suddenly showing on His face that sprang into it that day in Jericho when His eyes travelled unsatisfied over the wildly cheering streets until they lit on one face peering at Him through the branches, and then He stopped, and called Zacchæus, alone, so far as we read, out of that whole enthusiastic city. Here, at last, He felt was a man of whom He could make something, one who would let Him do for him what was in His heart for every one. "I did not find my friends," says Emerson, "the good God gave them to me." Nobody finds the great Friend. Always He gives Himself. It wasn't Zacchæus who ran to Christ, who cried as he scrambled from his perch, "Master! Master! wait for me. I am coming." It was Christ who stopped and called Zacchæus. In my case, so Paul tells us, it was like an arrest. I was pushing and jostling through the press of life, and a hand fell upon my shoulder, and I was face to face with Christ. And though I tried irritably to twitch myself away, His grip held fast, and I could not evade Him. Come, He said; and I had to go. Why it should be, I do not know—and to the end the man's eyes grow puzzled when he thinks of it, but I am sure it is. I am His because He so determined, and was stronger than I, won me. And so if we are Christ's, it is because He has compassed us about with a queer obstinacy of grace that closes every door against us, that shuts up every avenue of escape, that hems us in and round. So Christ Himself declares. You did not choose Me, He says. I chose you. He chose twelve, we read, that they might be with Him. That was all the disciples could say, when any one, looking them over with an odd expression on his face, asked bluntly, "But why

you ? For, to be honest, you don't seem a likely company for this adventure ! " And indeed they don't—Thomas with his lost face so slow to light up with intelligence and understanding ; and Peter with those wonderful ideas of his, that always seemed to himself so splendid, yet which so often crashed into hideous ruin, leaving him staring at the wreck in an incredulous astonishment, for he had meant so well ; and John with his hot pride and his quick tongue, and his irascibility. But why you, of all possible people ? We don't know, they answer humbly ; we can't think, but we are sure of this, that He did choose us.

And if you are Christ's, something like that has happened to you too. It does not sound likely, I admit. For you and I don't look like congenial company for Jesus Christ. With us surely He would suffer the utter boredom of one boxed into a railway carriage and long, hot hours and hours of an unceasing flow of talk concerning bullocks and manures ? Long ago Celsus looked with amused eyes at this ragged rabble with whom Jesus mingles. An odd Master this, he says, a very singular Master, indeed ! Other teachers call the good and the true and the worthy. But this Person chooses the strangest company ! And have you never told Christ to His face that for His own sake and that of the cause He really ought to drop you, that it is neither wise nor fair to handicap Himself with a poor creature who so misrepresents Him ? But Jesus Christ is incredibly loyal. If you know Him at all, you have discovered that. In the most distressing circumstances, when we are at our shabbiest, He is never ashamed to own us, greets us always as one whom He is really glad to see. He chose you because He likes you, because He feels there is some kinship between Him and you. " Can two walk together unless they be agreed ? " But you and I, He says, can understand, are drawn to, one another. My heart chooses you. And you ? Do you, on your side, find anything likeable in Me ? At least I know I

do in you, He says. As a bewildered soul expresses it, summing up what all Christ's people feel:

> "It was not that I cared for Thee;
> But Thou didst set Thy love upon
> Me, even me Thy little one."

Yes, admits Christ, I chose you, and I do so still.

And there is this, too, that Christ is sure that He can save the world if only He can gather a few ordinary people round Him (you and I, He thinks, would do) who will allow His influence to tell on them, till something of His nature shows in them and tells in turn on others. And, indeed, that is how the faith has usually spread. Most of us are Christians, not because, leaping from tussock to tussock, and often half engulfed in the black, treacherous bogs, we picked our precarious way to Christ, but because we saw the thing lived out in our father's strong, clean character, or in our mother's beauty of unselfishness. We mayn't be very spiritual people; there may be many things in Christianity that fairly puzzle us. And yet—as the man born blind, when they baited and cross-questioned him, admitted that it was all too deep for him, yet doggedly held to the one unanswerable fact, but this I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see, so, among all our confusions, we, too, take our stand solidly upon this, that we have seen the thing lived out, and know that there is nothing else to be compared with it, and if Christ can contrive to give us, too, a share in it, we are willing for that with all our hearts. So it is, as a rule, that the faith spreads. And Christ has chosen you to be one of His proofs. Oh, you cry, startled and confused, but I am not that type at all! Christ thinks you are. His choice of you is there as proof of that. Now what I need, He says, is somebody who will convince those round about him that the faith works, is real, does things. And His eyes keep running over those about Him. No, not this one, He decides: he hasn't grit and pluck enough; nor this one: he lacks stamina. And then His

eyes fall upon you. This is the very thing that I am looking for, He says. Here is one I can really trust. And He chose you.

Tremendous though it is, that is an office open to us all. For is there not a sense in which the poorer creatures we have been so far, the more vivid and dramatic and conclusive our evidence for Christ can henceforth be. But it is only in a sense. It is not true that the greatest sinner makes the greatest saint. It is the pure in heart that see God. I would rather have been that clean laddie to whom Christ's soul ran out than Mary Magdalene with all her wonderful experiences of the Master's grace. It was Augustine, huge soul though he was, who added a certain tang, a certain salt taste, to Christ's message that is not in the Gospels. That is the price that we have all to pay to this hour for the sins of his youth. Yet, in a sense, just because we have failed, we can now prove the power of Christ as others cannot. That was how Paul explained His call. He could not understand it, could not see why Christ should bother to bring Himself to deal with such a soul as his at all—and then a light broke in on him. That's it, he cried, that must be it! This Master of ours, feeling that there is one danger left that might still thwart His gospel, this, namely, that timid and unworthy souls will argue that it is all much too good to be true, or at least true for them, that they at any rate must be excluded, that by no possible interpretation of them, can the promises, wide though they look, be meant to stretch as far as them, and so be inclined to push the whole thing from them as no affair of theirs, like Mr. Watson's prisoner, who, hearing from the warders' casual talk that spring is marching north again, listens but dully, since to him, immured there in lifeless courts and unchanging stone walls, the spring so glorious to others is but "a legend emptied of concern, and idle is the rumour of the rose." And, so foreseeing, Christ, thought Paul, must have looked round Him for some final proof that would lay every possible doubt, and bring

conviction to the most diffident heart that it is not excluded, let the past be what it may. And He has fastened upon me, called me, in order that all down the ages whenever any soul is puzzled, suspicious, fearful that it can't be true for it, He can point them to me, and ask, What then of Paul? And that will settle every doubt, must banish the last trace and fragment of uncertainty!

It is to that you, too, are called, to be an open letter, as Paul puts it, written by Christ's own hand, showing those round about you what things Christ can do. We are to go into the world, and so to live our ordinary lives that, all unconsciously to us, those among whom we move will look at us again, and will begin to say, You know I used to doubt if there was much in Christianity save talk. But I have revised my opinion. There's So-and-so (that's you, you understand), that is a man in whom the thing is obviously working out. He used to be so touchy, so opinionative, so mean and shabby in his views, so dully ordinary. Yet now, undoubtedly, the man has won to self-control and a large generous mind, and—yes, I know it's a queer thing to say, but he has won to something more, something that somehow—though he never speaks about those things—makes you remember Jesus Christ! That is what Christ expects from us, for that He chose us, confident that we can do it. And, as Traherne says, "Can you be holy without accomplishing the end for which you were created?"

Still further, we must not forget that if it is in the ordinary things of common life that the main part of our service must be rendered, among poor little nothings that don't seem to have anything to do with religion or to impinge on it at all, being cheerful when tired, and unselfish at home, and thorough in work, and good-humoured in adversity, and kindly where and as we can, none the less Jesus Christ picked us out as people likely to be willing to spend ourselves for His kingdom. And, indeed, we promised so to do. The Sacrament was the recruit's oath of allegiance; and when we joined the

Church we swore, holding up our right hand before God and the particular battalion of Christ's forces we were entering, that we would be true to Him—yes, till death—and that always, everywhere, and in everything, He could count on us; that our means, our lives, our bodies were not ours any more but His, to be spent in His service as He chose. Yet what better is Christ for our presence in His Church? What have we done to help Him to advance His cause? When Paul saw Christ, this, he felt, is the one thing worthy of a life. From that day Christ became the only end to which he cared to put it, and on Him he lavished it all. And when Christ chose us, it was partly because He felt that we are of the same build as Paul; smaller, of course, by far, but of the same family, the same type of soul; because He thought we, too, would feel that He must come first in our dreams, our plans, our endeavours.

But what can I do, you say, I with my days so full, I with my mind so distracted, I with a life so rushed? More than we think. There is a very interesting Scripture which tells us of a supper that they gave Christ in Bethany. To think of our Lord and a supper is to see Him as the host, with both hands heaping upon us the benefits that have cost Him so much, although they are so free to us. But in this instance our Lord is the guest, takes gratefully from those very ordinary friends of His, thankful and happy for their liberality and kindness. That surely brings Him very near, and makes Him yet more lovable. Aristotle declared haughtily that his ideal man gives, for that is a mark of his superiority, but would never dream of taking, for that were to admit himself inferior. Christ is too big for that, too loving to grudge us the rights of friendship and the joy of generosity and helpfulness. And look from whom He took—just plain, unspiritual folk like you and me. Mary, indeed, may stand for the recognized type of the devout and obviously religious person. She was a reckless, lavish, prodigal giver, whom our cold natures will not readily match. But Lazarus is much more

like ourselves ; a dim and shadowy figure, younger than his sisters, one supposes, he never acts and never speaks. And yet the Evangelists record that that shy youth, that silent living proof of our Lord's power, did more for Christ, and made a far deeper impression in His favour than any one before the resurrection. So much so that the priests kept muttering angrily that until they put this fellow after whom every fool ran gaping open-mouthed out of the way, they would and could make nothing of their crusade against Jesus. But it is Martha that is our chief hope. She was a dear soul, fussy and noisy a bit it may be, who always enters with a rush and with a clattering of dishes, with her face hot from the kitchen fire, and with a smell of cooking blowing in behind her—the type that translates its religion into humdrum bits of practical service. Christ looked tired, and she would like to rest Him and to minister to Him. When He taught, her mind, perhaps, was apt to stray, to keep wondering anxiously whether she should not look out another blanket for Him for the night was growing cold, thinking what flowers He loved best at this season, and the like. For her affection ran out into that. Surely the patron saint of this unspiritual-looking age of ours so restless and hot and fussy and dreadfully energetic, not much given to prayer, chary of meditation, living in a constant whirring of machinery, turning our very churches into noisy factories full of a smell of oil, and elsewhere rather earthy at the best. And yet Jesus loved Martha—plain, ordinary, bustled Martha—and was helped by her. And you and I, however rushed we be, however seemingly unfitted for it by the whole build of our mind, however full our days, can help Him too. He asks our all ; He claims it as His right. And yet He will take any broken bits of strength and time we have left over ! Is not His Church largely dependent on what tired folk give Him in the evening after a full day ? And surely there is no day in which we could not do something for Christ ! And yet what are we doing ? "I need you," He says, coming to us

pleadingly with outstretched hands : " I can't save the world alone. Give me your help ! " That is why you and I are here, to aid Christ in His saving of the world, created for that end, even as He.

When a man told Sir Stafford Northcote, one of his opponents, of Lord John Russell's death, he added, " Poor Lord John." To which the other answered, " Why poor ? He was given a great chance and he took it." We, also, have been given a great chance. Will we take it ?

" Our greatest endeavour must be to make ourselves irreplaceable," says Unamuno, " to make the theoretical fact that each one of us is unique, that no one else can fill the gap that will be left when we die, a practical truth." For, after all, as Muhammad used to say, " Whatever God hath ordained can only be attained by striving."

III

ON A FAVOURITE SCRIPTURE DEFINITION OF RELIGION

"And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness."—GEN. xv. 6.

WHEN one publishes a book, it is interesting and sometimes perplexing to note what it is in it that strikes other people, the bits that get quoted, and that linger for a little in some readers' minds. For often it is not at all what the author himself would underline. And is it not striking and unexpected that with all the rush and magnificence of the Old Testament in their hands, nothing in its whole range seems to have helped and haunted and heartened the earliest Christians more, or perhaps so much, as this obscure incident hidden away in Genesis? The most diverse minds kept turning towards it, and seizing eagerly upon it. Paul and James, arguing for the moment in what look like diametrically opposite directions, both found upon it, with the comfortable feeling that here they have something very real and solid underneath their feet, that this is the very heart of religion, the thing itself in being, its whole essential meaning and plan and method revealed in one illuminating flash.

The sob and passion and penitence of the Psalms, in which the soul, sick of itself and all it is, flings itself upon God, with a queer confidence that, though it is He against whom it has been sinning so openly and insolently, He will somehow find some way to help it now; the wonder of that wise guiding hand leading their stumbling footsteps through all

the chaos and tumult of their confused history; the glory of the Prophets with their valour and their insight, peering far out into the deeps and mysteries of life, and coming upon the solution of much that seemed inexplicable—all that is very splendid and very full of God, no doubt. And yet always, you note, their eyes keep straying away even from these, and back to this simple tale of an old tired man, for whom things have not come to very much, whose years are quickly running out, whose dreams have broken, whose remaining hopes are obviously drooping and yellowing before his eyes, who has, indeed, been fooled and cheated by life, rather cruelly we would have said, promised so much, and given next to nothing. Yet he himself remains unsoured, unfretted, unafraid; waiting with quiet pulses, watching with steady eyes and no nervous fidgetiness, for what he knows will come. God promised it, so he says simply; and what God says never fails. No! it was no delusion, no mere beautiful dream of youth which has, of course, died away long ago into the drab grey of reality. But I did meet God face to face; and I did hear Him speak to me; and it will all come true.

That is religion, say the Scriptures, over and over; that is the thing defined for you, and visibly in action. And they look up at their great ancestor with a gasp of admiration. Here is a man who believed God, who assumed that He means what He says, and will assuredly stand to it; who lived his life upon that supposition, and held to it doggedly, though the time grew very long, and it all seemed to have become impossible. Men smiled at him, dismissing him as an old fool, an obstinate fanatic who would not face hard, ugly, staring facts. But God, we read, watched him with open exultation. Now that, He said, is what I call a life well spent, and what I mean by a good man. "He believed God," believed the hopeless-looking promise of a seemingly discredited God; and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Indeed the Scriptures make it plain that God's own heart was much moved by it. And little wonder! In the ungenerous ruck of us, who are so quick to grow suspicious of Him, so apt to read sinister meanings into His dealings with us, to assume with a surly snarl that this and that means, and must mean, He has forgotten all about us, or turned hard and cold, to come upon one soul so staunch and loyal to Him, one who never whined, never suspected Him, never even dreamed of doubting Him! "My friend," God called him proudly, in whose hands My good name is entirely safe, who never slanders Me, nor so much as hints a suspicion, upon whom I can absolutely count. That is religion, say the Scriptures.

But, practically and in blunt fact, what does all that mean for us? If a voice, which we knew to be God's voice, came to us out of the sky, awesome, august, authoritative —ah, then! But we hear no such voice. If a hand were laid upon our arm, as befell Lot that grim day at Sodom, inciting us to urgency. But we are left to pick our stumbling way towards truth, to feel our own uncertain road through this misty and dangerous life, without such palpable helps. And what, then, does it mean to believe God?

All of us, surely, have our higher moments of inspiration, when we are lifted up above ourselves, are bigger than our ordinary commonplaceness, see farther and more clearly. The sun breaks through and glints on life. And as it lies there, touched by that unaccustomed glory, we know that it is meant to be a greatly nobler thing than this crude nothing we are fashioning. We watch a figure that is strange and that yet looks familiar. And when it turns its head, it has our face, although its ways are Christ's ways, and its mind is Christ's mind. And with that our whole being has leapt to its feet, knowing in every fibre of it that that is what we should be making of ourselves, and that this poor makeshift affair that had so sordidly contented us won't do! We open a book, and some new truth claims us and beckons us im-

periously to follow. We meet a friend, and his coolness and steadiness make us shamefacedly conscious of our own hot and dusty fussiness, or his serene faith and quiet eyes challenge our querulous and timid spirits, or his clean, beautiful, unselfish life stings us with an honourable envy. We turn into a service, and suddenly the obtrusive world fades away to a thin and insubstantial shadow; and the big things we had forgotten in the noise and babble of the streets loom up strangely distinct again; and God, who had been crowded from our thoughts by the unceasing rush of clamant, pushful, little nothings, becomes all at once how real, how sure, how near! And with that we have grown dissatisfied with all we are, are stretching out lean, eager hands of wistful yearning towards something other and better and higher and quite different from this poor shuffling thing that bears our name. Well, that was God. That was His voice. That was Christ passing by, laying His hand upon your arm, looking you in your very eyes, and calling very you.

I know it passes: that all too often once in the street again, the rush and roar of life come surging back into the quiet, drowning, deadening, sweeping away; that out in the heat and jostle of the plain, at the drab facts of common day, lost in the usual routine that hypnotizes the soul fast asleep and leaves us little better than ingenious machines, what we saw for a moment on the mountain of transfiguration seems the veriest dream. And yet is it a dream?

There is an old Chinese poet, who lived many centuries before our Lord, who gives this as his counsel to a lost, puzzled, straying world: "Revere the heavenly moods, ephemeral though they seem." That is a lesson that the Scriptures also keep reiterating. To believe in your own highest moments, and to discredit flatly the insistent evidence of the mean periods between, to hold to it that what you were when you were face to face with Christ, and knew it, and your heart was stirred, and ran out eagerly after the great adventure with wonderful dreams shining in its eyes, that that was the

real you, and not this other shabby, slouching figure of your common days, to be unable to forget what you saw then, to be haunted by it, stubbornly to follow it though you may seem to get no nearer to it, to stake your life, flinging it down recklessly, upon the possibility that it can all come true, and true in you—that is religion. And to laugh it away, to allow yourself to be coaxed or browbeaten or persuaded or tired into bovine contentment with that petty thing you are, that is the sin against the Holy Ghost; that is to hear God speak, and know that it is God, yet dare to look Him in the eyes, and answer insolently, "I will not!"

Believe God: and it will be counted unto you for righteousness. "What is certain is," says Unamuno, "that for thinking believers to-day faith is, before all and above all, wishing that God may exist, and acting and feeling as if He did exist."

But, indeed, it is not easy to believe God. His promises are so tremendous, His hopes for us are so exceeding high, His thoughts are not as our thoughts, and are apt to stun us, to look utterly out of the question as we peer up at them from our low point of view. "You must be born again," says Jesus calmly. And He never asks impossibilities. When He says "must," we can. Yet the old Rabbi peevishly pushed that away. What is the use of talking senselessly, like that, he said. How can a man be born when he is old? And when Christ looks at us, and says that our way of things just won't do, that our whole character must come down to the very foundations and be rebuilt upon a worthier and ampler plan, that these engrained habits must be broken, that these characteristic foolishnesses must be snapped, that, in short, we must become quite other creatures, with new likings, new dislikes, new powers, new ways, new possibilities, we too are apt to turn away impatiently, to laugh incredulously like Sarah, or at least to agree with Celsus when he criticizes Christ so confidently, remarking that His whole idea is absurd upon the face of it, and His hopes demonstrably vain.

For everybody knows, he says, from long experience of actual life, that once any one has gone a certain length in sin and folly, there is no smallest prospect of reclaiming him, and cannot be, because inevitably the man is, and must be, carried down the hill, faster and faster, by his own impetus. There is no stopping him, not now. And we despondently agree. This, we say, hot with anger at ourselves, or perhaps only passive, broken, resigned, this is what we are, and it cannot be bettered now, not much, not radically. A little tinkering and pottering there may be, patching here and mending there; but this is the poor second best there is to hope for now. And it is wistfully and sadly that we look across at Christ and all the beauties and the glories that He offers, beauties that we do covet in our higher moods, and yet know that they are not for us, not now!

As Masefield says:

> "Sometimes I think that these wild lilies grow
> Out of a land where foot may never go,
> Out of a life that we may never know,
> That we may never know!"

Or, at least, it is dully and unexpectantly that we believe, not really much surprised that little happens, and that our unexciting days run so monotonously on and on. And Christ, for His part, turns and asks us searchingly that all-important question that decides everything, as He once did even to a leal friend of His who was bravely speaking right stout words out of a breaking heart. You talk about believing; but do you believe, really believe, that a soul foiled and baffled, its hopes all crashed to ruin, its dreams all out, itself dead and stone cold, can rise again and come out of its tomb, and even yet have a full, rich, satisfying life—believest thou that? And He waits for His answer with His eyes fastened upon you. "Not to believe," says John bluntly, "anything, everything that He has promised, not to be sure of that, as sure as if you had it in your own individual case or any other, is to look God in the face and say, coolly and

calmly and meaning it, You are a liar!" And do we really do that—you and I! The mere words set us shuddering; but the fact of it!

What do you say to testing it? His promises are clear and sure, are not in the least vague or indefinite or uncertain. There they lie for all to see. And do you really credit them for you; believe that they can work out in your life; believe that there where for you the pinch lies, there where for you the thing must be proved, or fail, there where it looks impossible, He will justify the best of them in your own actual experience? When Muhammad prayed to the Compassionate, he did not leave it general, but boldly trysted God to meet him where for him things had a way of breaking down—compassionate to me, he cried, about that sin of which Thou knowest, about that habit of which Thou knowest, about that flaw of which Thou knowest—compassionate to me, and compassionate there, where I have most need of compassion.

Dare you and I take God so audaciously and literally at His bare word, and hold to it that He will stand to every syllable He said? And can you, like Santi Deva, the old Buddhist saint, still unbroken by innumerable falls, shake your fist in the sneering faces of the strong passions that keep mastering you with such exasperating ease in spite of all your struggles, and cry to them defiantly, that, though they conquer you a million times, you will leap to your feet a million and one times, that they will never vanquish you, that you will never yield, will never make a tame surrender, never! never! never! that you will crush them in the end, however long the struggle be; that the brave dream is going some day to come true? And can you live, can you wait, can you die, still undauntedly believing in what looks, perhaps, as far away as ever?

Such hardihood and valour, say the Scriptures, are religion. The essence of the thing is not the winning but the daring, not even the finding but the set resolve that we will seek and seek, until, please God, we do find in the end.

I am the Way, said Christ once, not the goal and the prize only, but the route to them as well. To be upon the road seeking for the big dreams that seem to come no nearer —that also is to be in Christ. And every dusty traveller, with tired, plodding feet, and eyes that still look out ahead, is His.

"Not for us are content and quiet and peace of mind,
For we go seeking a city that we shall never find,
Only the road, and the dawn, the sun, and the wind, and the rain.
And the watch-fire under the stars, and sleep, and the road again.
We travel the dusty road, till the light of day is dim,
And the sunset shows us spires away on the world's rim."

How can I reach the great world? a crofter in some lonely glen might ask. And we would answer, Do you see far away yonder that long, thin, white winding ribbon? That is the road. If, over the bogs and through the peat-hags where the black water lies, you can make your way to that, follow it steadily, and it will take you to your goal. I am the Way, says Christ, and however far away from all you long for you may be, in the road is in the road. Follow it; and you, too, it will bring surely home.

Or take it of the world—the ailing, sinful, foolish world—with evil seemingly engrained in the very make-up of things, so frail, so stupid, so unwilling to be helped. What do you make of it? The Testament looks out upon it so big-heartedly, is so valiantly sure that not one of these mighty evils but will crash to its fall; already indeed it can see them swaying and tottering like trees in some tremendous gale. They were so pitiful a handful, these first Christians, with the whole serried world set frowningly against them, with old, old sins entrenched seemingly impregnably in human nature, with prejudices that nothing could uproot, opposing them, with the lumpish inertia of these dull, sluggish hearts of ours that can't be bothered to be overcome, with everything against them. And yet fearlessly, confidently, they fling

down their gauntlet to them all, have never a doubt of what the ultimate result must be. They learned that gallantry from Jesus Christ, the wonderful Christ, who, as He went to face the Cross and all the blackness of that utter horror, cried back to scared souls on the point of breaking: "In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," a saying that moved tough old Carlyle's soul to tears. Such valiant words, he mused, spoken in what a desperate situation! And, indeed, they do call to us like a trumpet blast, till the blood tingles, and races in the veins, and we could almost shout aloud with pride, have to fall in, whether we will or no, behind so glorious a leader, and for the moment are swept to Him.

And all these earliest followers of His had caught from Him that splendid chivalry of spirit, that heroic note. There is never a trace of fear in Paul's eyes; rather as he watches the enemy massing themselves against him, the man is obviously exulting in the coming clash. For in Christ we are more than conquerors—yes, we, frail though we look, and this will again prove it!

That is the right fighting spirit; and faith, to be called faith, can have no other. "The people that know their God," says Daniel, "shall be strong, and shall do exploits." Ay, who know such a God as ours! And surely we do know Him, and have had our own unchallengeable experiences of His sufficiency, have cause to be very sure by now, that, let the call on us be what it may, His strength is really enough in which to meet it. And yet we are so hesitating, so uncertain; we compromise so meanly where we might be winning glorious victories; we acquiesce so tamely in many things we hate, when we might sweep the field!

If only we believed God and His promises, assumed that this is true, not a mere rumour too good to be fact, not simply a wild dream they dream in churches, and then of course it all goes out, but a thing on which we can found; and so believing, flung ourselves whole-heartedly into the

struggle with the evils that defy us, what would we not see with our very own eyes, in our own very day ?

And yet, in truth, it is not easy to believe God. For His ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts. Sometimes things grow so very slow that surely, we think, He must have forgotten. "It is impossible for me," says Mr. Baldwin, "if I live to be the age of Methuselah to see the things I am working for materialize. I have to work entirely by faith." And sometimes the way that He chooses for us is so steep and hard, that it is difficult to credit that we are not fairly lost.

James was fascinated by that dreadful climb up Mount Moriah, just they two, the father and the son, in whom was bound up all his hopes and dreams and life. Ah, think of it, when they had left the servants and the beasts behind them, and went on alone ! What a tremendous tumult and sheer chaos must have been seething in the man's distracted mind ; the solid ground on which he had built confidently swaying and rocking underneath him ; the steadfast skies themselves tumbling in upon him ; God proved false ; God false ! His promises mere empty words and worse, sheer cruel mockery ; nothing in heaven or earth left fixed and sure and stable and dependable. Yet the man uttered no word of reproach, climbed on. And even when the boy, with a fearful suspicion freezing into certainty, asked, "Father, here is the wood, and here is the knife, but—but where is the lamb for the sacrifice ?"—the other, looking, I think, steadily ahead, and with his hands closing hard upon what he was carrying till the knuckles showed white, answered with a voice still steady, "Laddie, God will provide a lamb for the sacrifice." Little wonder that Luther bursts out, "No man, since the apostles' time, has rightly understood the legend of Abraham. The apostles themselves did not sufficiently extol or explain Abraham's faith, according to its worth and greatness. I much marvel that Moses so slightly remembers him."

Ah, no! when some grim terror leaps at us out of the dark, when what we love is taken from us, when our happy, settled way of things falls into tumbled ruins round us, when somehow life grows bleak and shivery and lonely, and the heart is sore and frightened and cold, it is not easy to believe that God knows best, and has not lost the way; that this that He is sending us, this too is love.

Ay, and there was Another who once climbed a hill yet steeper, up and up into a blackness yet more black. Think of Christ on His way to Calvary, with everything to do, with nothing as yet, as it seemed, accomplished, with not one soul that really understood. Surely He must have thought that God, if there be any God at all, must interpose! And as He neared the place, surely He must have felt it will be now, it must be here! Halt! rang out the curt order. They were at the spot. And surely Jesus must have waited with held breath, watching for God to break in. And yet God did nothing. Slowly, methodically, without hurry, they nailed Him down securely to the cross; the horror took its course; His strength was ebbing; death drew near; and the whole needy world was still unsaved! And God seemed to be looking elsewhere, not to notice, not to care! All that Christ had ever asked of Him was that He would use Him for His glory, and to help these sinful men and women; that, let the cost to Him be what it may, He might become that Promised One who would redeem them. And His prayer had not been given Him! O God! the unsaved world, the unsaved world! And with that Christ had to wade through deep and rushing waters, black and cold, and roaring. My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me? And yet He reached the farther bank, and died, calm, unafraid, triumphant, still audaciously believing in the God who appeared to have failed Him utterly. And that is why He is given a Name that is above every name. Tested to the uttermost, He believed God.

"Christ's atonement," said Marcus Dods, "was nothing

more than His quietly and lovingly accepting all that sin could do against Him." And yet that I can understand. But that He should have quietly and lovingly accepted all the darkness and the mystery of God's inscrutable plans for Him, surely that is an even greater wonder, and His triumph of all triumphs. He believed God upon the Cross. He met death, and the seeming sheer futility of His whole life, and the apparent open mocking of His faith, met it, still believing.

You, too, may not have much to show for all your efforts, all your striving, all your prayer. Only the same soiled and twisted life, only the same foolish blundering heart, only the same uncertain faith, that still, at times, fails you suddenly and disconcertingly—you know not why. It is not easy to believe it is all true for you. Still, hold to it. And one day, not so very far away, God will come out to meet you with that greeting He gave Abraham. "My friend," He will say, looking at you lovingly, who, set where things were often dark and difficult, and with not much to encourage, never doubted, never whimpered, never quailed, but worked for Me without hope of reward, and with no visible success to urge you on, believed in Me where there was never a trace of proof, only my naked word, only My uncorroborated promises. "My friend," upon whose loyalty I know I can depend. And, together, you will turn to face eternity, with its unreckonable opportunities, with its unthinkable honours, with all the splendour of its august services, God and your soul, upon which He has proved that He can absolutely count.

"The real glory of man," says Al Ghazzali very grandly, "consists in his capacity for an eternity of progress." And what will God not do with a soul that He can trust. A whole eternity of progress, of ever wading deeper, of ever knowing better, of ever growing more and more like God!

"I thought," said old Rabbi Duncan, in the days of his doubts and his darknesses, "I thought that, if only I could win to it, this is a faith worth believing."

IV

THE GOD OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe."—PROV. xviii. 10.

A NAME nowadays does not mean very much; but once upon a time it was a key-word and an index to its possessor's character. Every name was in those days a kind of nickname, so to speak. It was designed to give a flash of insight into the man's nature. It was a pithy summing-up of what those with whom he mingled had observed in him. It was a photograph passed on from hand to hand. You have not met him yet. Well, when you do, this will enable you to recognize him. This is his likeness, these are his ways, here are the characteristics that leap to the eye. Given his name, you knew the man. For it was not thrown at him at haphazard, but affixed to him with care. He was called that, because people had found that he was that.

Is it always sufficiently remembered that the names which the great saints give God were reached in that same way; that the glorious assumptions that they make about Him are not merely guesses and surmisings and splendid supposings, but that they, too, are built up upon actual experience of Him; that in them those who know Him best tell, not what they think or dream or hope, not what may be, but what they have actually found. This is no case of gazing up into the blank heavens and imagining that the great Being who dwells there might be this, and must be that. These people had met God constantly in the actual

living of their ordinary lives ; and the names they give Him are their evidence of what in their own definite experience He has done and been to them. Behind each of them lie masses of facts just as real as any other facts, and the name is the conclusion to which these have forced their minds.

Muhammadans are justly proud that long before he became a prophet, during the many years in which he was an ordinary business man, Muhammad was known far and wide as Al Amin, the trusty. Innumerable little daily faithfulnesses went to the making of that honourable reputation of absolute reliability, of one whose word was as good as his bond, who never failed. And when Jesus Christ tells us with such assurance that we can count on God, and can safely put away worry and anxiety—we who are children with a very watchful Father to take care of us—He knows that, because over and over and over again He has proved it in His own consistent experience. When He looks up into God's face and says, " Thy word is truth," does not that mean that He has found that, always and however huge and wonderful and seemingly impossible His promises may be, God stands to every letter of them with exactness, never creates hopes that mock us, never lights dreams only to blow them out and leave the dark blacker than ever. And if, as Christ frankly concedes, it often looks like that, as if in life as well as in His world, God has allowed cruel mirages that, even as lips cracking with thirst stoop to them, fade away ; and these meet nothing but the hot, dry sand—it is not really so. For what God says, God does, so I have found without exception, Christ declares ; and upon that you can rely as on a thing proved and unalterable.

So, all these glorious names of God are built up on the actual experience of actual men and women. Words are never dead things. Rather the commonest of them are full of daring poetry and history and life. Ah, but how much there lies behind the simplest affirmations that we make of God ! We remark carelessly, and as if it were the merest

and most obvious platitude, that He is wise, or He is good, and think nothing about it. But how much patient grace went to the proof of that! How many sore and aching hearts were comforted, how many baffled and discouraged souls were helped where hope was out, before men realized and were persuaded of the divine goodness and tenderness, before the staring facts of their own lives, too obvious to be overlooked, forced them to take that in.

Bunyan, in his doubts and difficulties, wished he could come on a book written long ago telling of how another soul, faced by his very temptations, was brought through them by God's grace. Each of the names we give God is just such a record written by innumerable hands. Like Jesus going before to Jerusalem, with the disciples trailing along behind Him somewhat doubtfully, the great spirits who see further and think deeper go before us, too, and make their wonderful discoveries in God, like Hosea, gaining spiritual insight from the tragedy of his pathetic home, and boldly arguing from the full and free forgiveness that he found in his own heart that there must be the same and more in God's, and that from no one of us all, however sinful, can He turn away. But so far for the mass of us that was as yet only a glorious theory. At first people looked at it doubtfully. It is very beautiful, but is it true? And men took it and slowly and thoroughly tested it by the hard facts of their actual lives, and as they did this more and more became convinced that it is even so, that they were shut up to accept this wonderful conclusion. And only then did the new tenet gain its place securely in the human creed. Another constellation had flamed out in the heavens; and thereafter, all the ages down, the skies that overarch us are by far more beautiful and splendid.

And so what this old writer felt as he looked back at all that had gone to the making of the religion that meant everything to him, was how immensely fortunate it is for ordinary folk like you and me—naturally so suspicious of God, so easily hurt and offended by Him if His will clashes against ours

at all, so apt to think hardly and bitterly of Him, always so fearful that some evil may leap at us out of the shadows —that these mighty discoverers in the Divine felt their way through life before our day, that they learned to know God so intimately, and that they took such pains to share their knowledge of Him with us who in our turn have to set out quite inexperienced and at the start of things; that as the embryo is said to climb up man's whole genealogical tree, reproducing in a compressed way the slow, gradual advance that in the race covered spaces of time, terrifying in their length, in a month or two, so we now do not need really to start at the beginning or at least can hurry over that, are helped towards truth immeasurably by those who went before us, and whose climbing feet have worn an infinitely easier path for us. It is an immense benefit that the poorest of us can draw, and draw so largely, on the banked experience of mankind real solid coin, what our fellow-men have proved.

Otherwise, he thinks, we would be in an evil plight. For here are you and I, set down in this difficult life, with these frail, blundering hearts of ours, with much to scare and fluster us, with the certainty before us that we shall enjoy no exemption from the ordinary human lot, but that at our door also long before the end, pain and sorrow and trouble and loneliness will come thundering truculently and will force an entrance; with grim powers of darkness steadily set upon destroying us, horribly strong, dreadfully cunning, deadly in their patient malevolence, watching us with unwinking eyes, and always crouched to spring. "You have thwarted me to-day," snarled Mara the Evil One to Buddha, "yet you cannot escape me in the end. For like your very shadow I will dog you day by day, hour by hour, second by second. And some time or other I shall come upon you in a depressed or an unwatchful mood, and then I will storm your heart. Try how you may, you can't escape."

And, indeed, we do seem to have little chance, and the task set us looks by far too difficult for us till there comes news

of this wonderful God who to others in the very circumstances in which we are now, with our life to live, our hazards to face, our trials to master, proved for them so gloriously sufficient. And with that surely the temptation that had looked so depressingly imposing shrinks and dwindles to a shadow of itself; and what is asked of us grows somehow much less than it was. Alone, it was so obviously impossible; but with this God beside us we know that it can be done, ay, and by us.

And the splendour of it is that we are not founding upon mere rumour, on a carried story blowing about the world, not likely to have much substance in it. What John takes such pains to emphasize for us about the absolute reliability of what in the New Testament they tell us about Jesus Christ is true of all the central findings of religion. These, too, are first-hand evidence, not merely what has been vaguely reported by somebody to some one else, but what the men who tell us of them have themselves seen, and themselves heard, and themselves experienced in their own personal life. They stake their honour on it. On the lesser matters of religion the evidence is not unanimous, and about these we cannot be anything like so sure, and we should say so frankly, making the essential creed a brief one. But many though the sects be, upon the main points there is no clash of witnesses; but every one with any right to speak at all has the same tale to tell. So much so that if this is not to be credited then there is no manner of use in calling witnesses on anything, for evidently nothing can be taken upon human evidence at all. I know and am persuaded that this thing is true, so they all say to us. For what I tell you, I am reading from my own experience. I am quite sure of it, because it happened to me.

This proverb sums up in a very vivid picture the happy difference for all of us which man's discoveries in God have made. Imagine, it says, a little knot of travellers, merchants, or the like, in some wild mountain pass, beset by brigands,

finding sudden death leaping at them from everywhere, huddled together there, scared, unarmed, helpless, desperate, till their eyes fall on a strong border-keep not far away, and with that a new half hope springs back into their heart; they make a dash for it, pantingly they fling themselves through the happily open gates, hear them clang to behind them—and what a difference there is in their condition all in a moment! A second since, they were running madly in the open yonder, with little chance of life, and with an ugly death horribly near, with arrows whizzing past their very ears, or viciously kicking up little puffs of dust upon the roadway at their very feet, with everything as good as over. And now how far away all that has suddenly become, and how safe and secure they feel there in that sheltered place with these strong walls no one can scale about them, and against which the arrows hurtle futilely to fall back spent and blunted, while they are there with their breath found again, shut into a great calm.

And so, he says, if you are growing anxious and worried and nervous about things, if life looks too hard for you, if somehow you are losing heart and courage, you are forgetting God—that must be what is wrong. If you would but remember Him, recall what He has done for others with your very needs, there in that selfsame place where you are now—do you imagine that you are the first to be tempted and tried and discouraged?—and how He brought them through where there seemed never a path, and one sank to the knees in bog at every step, your heart would rally and grow calm and confident like these panting men finding those impregnable walls round them, and with their fear gone.

What then did our predecessors, tempted and tried as we are now, find that God did for them? To begin with, He gave them the comfortable feeling they were not alone. That in itself means much. For in its essence, life is a lonesome thing. Each one of us must make his own decisions, face his own temptations, live out his own life; is shut into the solitude of his own personality, and no one

can come into it more than a little way to walk with him. In these void, eerie spaces where the rivers of life have their rise we are alone, hear nothing but the beating of our own hearts, and the echoing of our own footsteps.

> "Space is ample east and west,
> Yet two cannot walk abreast."

That is at times a frightening thing. But the saints with assurance challenge and deny the fact of it. You are never alone, they aver : are never left to stumble on as best you can and by yourself. But always there is Some One else quite close, Some One of marvellous sufficiency, of an amazing kindness, and of a strangely understanding depth of sympathy ; Some One who never fails, who never forgets, who does not wait to be asked to help, but who breaks in to us and spends Himself eagerly and whole-heartedly for each of us, as if He had no other care in all His crowded universe except your soul.

If that be really true, and they are all emphatic on it as the clearest fact in their whole life, what an amazing difference it makes ! The pilgrim in Bunyan was half dead with terror, as he felt his way along that perilous edge in the ghastly valley, with what hideous dangers on both sides of him—a slip and all were over—and it was so dark; till he heard another voice not far from him, and with that his fears had largely vanished. For he was not alone there in that dreadful place, but there were two of them ; and, in need, one could stretch a helping hand out to the other. Even the presence of another heart weak as our own is a huge comfort. But if the other who is with us in our troubles and temptations be no frail man like ourself, but God—why, surely, fear becomes sheer silliness.

And God is there, say all those with the right to speak —you can be absolutely sure of that—there where you see Him with you, there, too, where you do not. Yes, says a bold Psalmist, even if I make my bed in hell, behold Thou

art there! Wherever you are, there God is. And you and He together, God and you, cannot you manage it with honour? It may be sore and difficult, but God and you!

And remember, that is the verdict of experience. So these men had actually found, and that not now and then, but always. They were never left alone, but always God was there. And you can count upon it, too, they say.

The man who wrote the finest thing on God in any literature outside the Gospels, the hundred and third psalm, was, it seems, a father; and one day it occurred to him what an enormous place his children held in his life; how naturally, and without thinking of it, he spent himself upon their behalf, how dull his life would be without them. Or perhaps some of them had fallen desperately ill, and the man could not get the thought of the hot, restless little hands and the high, delirious, racing voice out of his mind. He couldn't keep away, he couldn't settle to his ordinary work, he had to come tiptoeing back, time after time, with something else that might help or relieve them, or just to be there. And with that it rushed in upon his mind, and isn't this a perfect picture of God and these poor fretted, ailing, sinful souls of ours? Haven't we, too, a Father who cannot get us out of His thoughts, cannot leave us in our trouble and turn to other things, but has to spend Himself on our behalf out of pure love to us? How often we have had the coolness of His hand laid upon our hot forehead; how often in our weakness we have felt around and under us the everlasting arms lifting and holding us, how safely; how often He has proved that "as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him."

Yes, says Christ boldly—and them who do not! No shabbiest prodigal of us all, slouching through life, but has his own place in God's heart that nothing else can fill. And when we fling away from Him, tired and sick, as we tell Him hotly, of the tame home life, He misses us, and can't forget us, often steals to the door, and gazes up and down a long while many times a day, watching and hoping against hope; and if at

last He sees a ragged, dusty, hesitating thing, looks toward it eagerly, and while it swithers in wretched uncertainty, trying to force itself to face the terrible just anger that it knows that it has merited, runs to it with His arms outstretched, and His face lit with a great gladness, and the happy, welcoming, appropriating cry, "My son, My son," and gathers him, rags and shame and all he is, close to His heart. That, says Christ, we can count on with assurance.

And though it sounds impossible, multitudes, greatly daring, have ventured to test even that, and know now it is true. That, also, for them is experience.

God's gifts to us are unthinkable in their lavish kindness; yet better than the best of them, than all of them together, is the glory and the wonder of the fact of God Himself; and for Himself it is we need to thank Him most of all—that He is, that He is all that He is, that He is only what He is! "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!" No doubt! But what are we to say to Christ for His gift to us of our knowledge of the Father!

You are tired, so desperately tired you can't see how it is to last much longer; or you are ailing, and what if your health really gives? or life has somehow become bleak and lonesome, and you are afraid? Aren't you forgetting God? or aren't you doubting and discrediting what all those who really know Him say is absolutely certain? "Your Father knows that you have need of all these things." And He will see to it. You will have difficulties, but God will open doors for you, where you can see no doors. And you will often fail Him, but He will not fail you—not once. "Never, never will I leave you; never, never will I let go your hand"—so that we can boldly say, the Lord is our Helper. Where had the prophet found that? Where but in his own experience! And the great soul who quotes it in the Hebrews knew it to be true because his daily life corroborated it, often in the strangest, most dramatic ways. Yes, we can found upon it boldly, but quite safely. Always you will be ringed

round by a jealous care, a faithful and unsleeping watchfulness that will never forget and never stumble. And so, for His part, Christ went His brave way through His own difficult life with a peace in His heart that the world cannot give nor take away. And if you asked Him how. How! He said. Why, because I know that "I am not alone, but that the Father is with Me." And, He adds, looking again at us so troubled and puzzled and uneasy, and He is your Father too—your God as well as Mine.

Isn't it true that if, as George Macdonald says, we believed in God's Fatherhood, really with no ifs and buts, that if we took refuge in the names of God, in what others have found Him to be, we should feel like these breathless people looking up thankfully at the strong walls encircling them, suddenly grown how safe, how sheltered, how amazingly secure. When we are "saved," says Bosanquet, the philosopher, "we are at home in the universe, and in principle and in the main, feeble and timid creatures as we are, there is nothing anywhere within the world or without it that can make us afraid."

Further, say all those who really know Him, God is a holy God. And nothing so thrills and excites them, or makes their hearts anything like so happy, or fills them with such courage and enthusiasm as the thought of that. That He is kind is much; who of us can begin to reckon up how much? But that He is holy—who can even try to estimate the glorious difference that makes, the splendid consequences that must flow from it? This is indeed the best of tests whether we know the real God or do not. If your God can allow you to remain complacently the poor thing that you are; if He tells you soothingly not to worry—that He, for His part, is not making a fuss about your faults and failures, will not overpress such matters, will smuggle you through somehow; if He seems to agree with Maeterlinck, who once pictured Him as sitting smiling on a sunny mountain, looking down indulgently upon us in our sinfulnesses, much as we do at puppies worrying

each other on the hearthrug—then there is something essentially wrong. For all who know God by more than mere hearsay are at one in this—that He hates sin, that He can't abide it, that He won't have it, that He will let no friend of His settle down in it in peace. So they have found.

And, further, they are sure of this, that if any one sickens of sin and tries to break with it, the whole universe hurries to his assistance; the entire make-up of life is specially contrived to give such a valiant soul its chance, and the untoward things that had so puzzled us—the pain, the sorrow, the temptation—are now seen to be intricate and most ingenious machinery constructed for this very aim and end. We want to be comfortable, and so we whimper when life hurts us. But God has designed it to make us holy: and it is on that that He is set.

And to these men in the Bible that seemed far and away the most glorious fact in all this glorious world. "If," says Juliana of Norwich, "afore us were laid together all the pains in Hell and in Purgatory and in Earth—death and the rest—and by itself sin, we would rather choose all that pain than sin. For sin is so vile and so greatly to be hated that it may be likened to no pain that is not sin. And to me was showed no harder hell than sin." And these hearts too so loathed and hated sin, yet they kept sinning, to their own unspeakable disgust. They struggle against it desperately, yet it baffles them and drags them down time after time with maddening ease; it wounds them to the soul to be so soiled and smirched by a thing so repulsive to them in their better moods, and yet it is engrained in them and won't wash out. They strive, they hope, they pray, yet without much effect they feel; seem helpless, baffled, beaten, condemned always to be this! And it is with an inexpressible sense of relief that it comes home to them that God is holy, that He hates sin with a hatred to which theirs is nothing, that He can't bear it in the same universe as Himself, and has thrown in everything He has and is to grind it into nothing-

ness, and will not rest till it is gone, the last lingering atom of it, till it is no more than an ugly, old time, quickly-fading memory of what has become utterly impossible, will never be ever again.

God is holy. Let men believe that, and they know they have a wonderful Ally; and, as troops who have been fighting doggedly and grimly, yet always falling back with sore and sinking hearts, when the tide of battle turns, will throw themselves joyously into the most deadly perils, laughing, singing, cheering, in the happiest spirits, for now they are upon the winning side, so will such souls fling themselves back into the hottest of the fighting unafraid, big-hearted, confident, quite sure that goodness is a bigger and a stronger thing than evil and will tear it down at last. For God must conquer everywhere; yes, where it looks so hopeless, even in their own frail, wayward hearts.

If you are tiring and dispirited, if things seem to be making little way with you, if some habit defies you and will not pull up, tug at it how you may, if Christlikeness seems far away as ever after all your prayers and plans and hot endeavours—when the people in the Testament felt like that they gathered again at the Cross, and looking up at that tremendous proof of how God hates sin, their sin, that sin that is mastering them, of the unthinkable lengths to which He is prepared to go, has actually gone, to overwhelm it, go back to the hopeless-looking task of unpicking that tangle of a character knotted so hard, of straightening that life of theirs so set in crookedness, unafraid, confident, laughing in their hearts for sheer contentment. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe." And if you, too, keep in your mind that God is holy, that He has proved that He is holy by His horror of sin and His enormous sacrifice to break it, cannot you face your old temptations with set teeth and steady eyes, quite sure that, however often your will gives, however regularly you are baffled, however sorely you are flung time after

time, if you keep trying, with this God to help you, there can only be one end to it, at last. "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness." Ay, well we may! But is it not always the best of omens when troops go into action, not sullenly and not with dragging feet, but singing? And what else can our souls do?

For if God is holy, there is only the one possible issue: good must win, and evil must go down, yes, even that sin that defies us. If He is holy! say all those who know Him. If! But we have proved He is.

Again, God's people keep exulting in their knowledge and experience of His power. That was the first attribute of the Divine that man discovered. When they were still primitive and savage, it grew clear to them through the crashing of the hurricanes in the forests and the growling mutter of the thunder overhead. And at first they were afraid, cowering before One so terrible in His strength. But as they learned to know Him better, that which was once their fear became their hope and confidence and stronghold. For they had found that if He is mighty, He is mighty to save; that all that lies, not against them but behind them, theirs upon which to draw in their own struggle; that not until the Almighty fail, that not until His throne tumbles in ruin, that not until infinite power breaks through under the strain, can they be overcome. And so in evil days they loved to soak their minds in the greatness and the majesty of God. They would look back at history, at the wonders He had wrought, not dreams but facts; at how He led their fathers out of Egypt, at the astonishments He worked on their behalf. And He is alive now, they said exultantly, the same God still. And for us also He will do such wonders as will draw and hold the eyes of all the coming generations, be the final proofs that will always make them certain of Him, and of His sufficiency for them.

Or when the struggle in the world or their own hearts

seemed futile, they would stand long time and watch the slow, silent procession of the stars across the skies, or listen to the surge and thunder of the surf upon the beach, and that would rally them. The crash of the storm was to them a gospel; the earthquake shock that set the earth reeling steadied their faith. "O Lord, my God, Thou art very great," they said, and nestled down in their renewed sense of that with a comfortable feeling of security.

That earliest attribute of God to be discovered burns now, like an ageing star wanly and dimly in our day. There is no thought of Him that we use less, or about which our age appears to be more uncertain. There is much talk about a struggling God. He means well, that we see. But is He big enough for His tremendous task of ordering the world aright? We seem inclined to doubt it. Tennyson, in a depressed mood, looked round him and what he saw seemed to him like the amateur work of a bungler, and Mr. Wells is confident that the good God wages, and must wage, a hopeless fight on our behalf against powers He can never overcome. That is the present mood. We are, of course, a tired generation, in the trough of the reaction from a mighty effort and a mightier dream. But for the time the old assurance, the old brave confidence, the old ringing note are gone. The God of our day is small and petty, has little resemblance to the august Being all the saints knew, to whom this earth of ours is but a footstool, and time, in its immensity, a very little thing. Why we should be so downcast I can't think. For never all the ages down has God been either more manifest or marvellous, look where you will, than in our time. Every day shows the world to be a more amazing place than was ever suspected, that if there be a God at all His mind is more and more bewilderingly wonderful, His power more paralyzing, than man had dared to dream. He has thought out impossibilities, yet they are done; He has imagined sheer incredibilities, and they have all come true. But all these marvels are mere works dropped by the way from His full hands. His real

will (oh ! He fashions worlds in the by-going), but the real dream on which His wonderful mind is set is your sanctification, is that you and I and all men should be lifted up into His own holy likeness, so those who know Him all declare. And look about you, what has He not done ? And will this little heart of ours always defy Him with success ? Or will this evil habit that breaks us prove too strong for Him too ? He who did all these miracles, will He be baffled here ? With such a God at work upon us, surely we must win ! Think of His greatness, lose yourself among the stars, wander in the infinitudes He guides, amid which this great world of ours is an unnoticed atom, nothing more, and as in these men with the gates clashing behind them, fear in you will die.

Or lastly—for who can speak of all the constellations ablaze in the heavens on a frosty night, or touch upon even a little of all there is to hearten us in God as men have found Him in their actual experience—if power was the earliest attribute of God to catch and hold men's eyes, was not almost the last His patience ? Yet, in the end, it is to that that we must cling ! His marvellous, immeasurable patience. Naturally, we think swiftness and immediacy are the marks of God. With the Almighty, surely, to will is to have ; He speaks and it is done. And yet it is not really so, not always so, not even usually so. Science has been a real Evangelist ; and almost its favourite sermon is upon God's slowness. Did He fashion the sun with a quick wish ? Did He say, " Let the world be saved," and it was so ; and the evening and the morning were the first day. Ah no ! He thinks in æons and immen sities. His dreams are long, long dreams that stun our little minds. He wins to the impossibilities He plans by an unthinkable, awesome persistency. Once He has purposed anything, He will not be deflected from it ; and in the end His will gets done.

And it is this same mind that is set upon our salvation, that stubbornly keeps working toward it, with the same, almost frightening patience ! Often and often

though we fail Him, time after time though we have spoiled His plans, quietly, with no anger, no reproaches, strangely little punishment, He begins again with the same calm persistence that is going to have its way, until a glorious sense of utter helplessness comes over us. "The God of all patience," the apostle calls Him, so telling us what He had been in his own life. And is that not a name of infinite hope? And is it not most surely true? Cannot we, too, corroborate it word for word? For think how we have treated Him, and how exasperating we have been, yet He still loves us, still believes in us, is still quite sure that even yet it can come true. Listen, and you will learn Christ is not fretted to anger by our crossness and stupidities, but gives God thanks for us and all our friendship and our fellowship have brought into His life; speaks to God wonderingly of this huge gift He has thought out for Him; and He means you and me! Tertullian, human, petulant, irascible, stared wonderingly at Jesus Christ. They should have known that He was God, he said at last; they should have seen it clearly in His patience, a saying which makes clear what picture of God his own life had drawn for him. And has not our life drawn it too? As Attar put it long ago, so have we found:

> "For like a child, sent with a fluttering light,
> To feel his way along a gusty night,
> Man walks the world; again, and yet again
> The lamp shall be by fits of passion slain;
> But shall not He who sent him from the Door
> Relight the lamp once more, and yet once more?"

"After those words," says old Ramon Lull, "he remembered his sins and comprehended how great a good it is that in God there is patience."

These, then, are a few things which men have found in God through their own actual experience of Him. And all those with the right to speak corroborate each other. And what, then, should we do about it practically? Al Ghazzali

too, falls back upon this very metaphor, saying that most people's religion comes to nothing because they don't use it in their need. They speak about it, they believe it, yet do nothing. If, he protests, a man suddenly finds himself face to face with a lion, what good does it do to keep repeating, "I take refuge in that fort, I take refuge in that fort," if he stands still and never moves a foot? Run, you fool, run! or it will crouch, and spring, and seize and maul you, run! And so, he argues, what manner of good is it for men to keep reiterating in their prayers and the like, "I take refuge in God, I take refuge in God," if they only say that, and don't do it! We must use our religion.

You are flustered and uneasy. Feel for the hand of God your Father, and be sure that He is your Father, thinking of you with a father's care, and you will find a hand does close on yours. Or you are disconcerted that so little seems to come of all your spiritual strivings. Turn to the Cross again, and, looking up at it, really take in that it is not upon your own poor efforts and weak will but upon God's eternal plans and dearest wish you lean, and that will rally you. Or you are baffled and beaten, and it seems no use trying further. Sink your tired, fretted mind deep down into the infinite deeps of God's unthinkable majesty and patience, and, like these panting people knowing they are saved, so will you feel strong walls about you, will find yourself in a cool, sheltered place with your breath come again; better than that, will, like Paul, fling yourself unafraid once more into the fight, knowing that He that is with you is more than all they that can be against you; that through Him you can do all things, yes, even this your mind instinctively puts forward as an obvious exception; can become more than conquerors, yes, even over that, that always masters you. And you are building, not upon a dream, a hope, a beautiful imagination, a vague, glorious perhaps, but on the actual and proved experience of all those who have ever tried.

V

ON SOME INADEQUATE VIEWS OF JESUS CHRIST

"And by the way He asked His disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. And He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am?"—MARK viii. 27–29.

"WHOM do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" asked Christ. And, as He gathered the various opinions that His friends had heard, this, at least, became abundantly clear that folk as a whole were thinking about Him, that at the street corners where men gathered of an evening, He was a constant subject of discussion; and that, though the religious authorities were hot in their contempt for this upstart who, they said loftily, had better get back to His tools, and cease to meddle with things much too deep for Him, the people as a whole had been immensely impressed by what He said, and what He did, and what He was, so that, however sharply they might differ about Him, they were all agreed to this extent at least that this man in their midst took rank by right among the very greatest figures in their history. Christ was much in their minds, was too big and exciting for them to be able to forget Him. They had to think Him out, to deal with this new and impressive fact that had entered their lives, to fit Him into their scheme of things, and their eyes kept looking towards Him.

That is an atmosphere which, very largely, Christ is being denied to-day. People are not thinking of Him much: other things absorb their thoughts, seem to them far more interesting and important. Even those of us who are inside

it will agree that, in the main, the Church, and all for which it stands, occupies a palpably smaller place in the life of the average member that it did in former days. We explain it on the ground that life has become fuller, and that, of necessity, our attention nowadays has to percolate over a wide area instead of rushing foam-flecked down a narrower channel—which is to say, in other words, that Christ is getting lost to us in the crush and throng of things, does not loom up as arresting, as unique, as all-important, as He did to our forefathers. Yet that, when you come to think of it, is no bad definition of unspirituality. While as for those without, is it not the simple fact that the Church and the Master whom it represents are being met to-day, not by opposition (that is often heathful), nor by discussion (that can be answered); but that it is being blandly ignored as the veriest trifle of no manner of importance either way.

That is the deadliest of insults. To be angry with anything is at least evidence that you attach some importance to it. But to overlook it, to gaze through it as if it were not there, that is a slight indeed. And yet, if our Lord were to ask us in our time, "What are they saying about Me?" would we not be compelled in honesty to answer that, so far as we can judge, very many round us are not thinking of Him at all, that He rarely enters their minds, that He seems to have no manner of interest for them, and that their lives run on, in many ways, exactly as if He had never been, as if the solemn shadow of the Cross did not lie broad and challenging across the busy world.

That is the most tragic verdict that can be pronounced on any age. Long ago Christ told us that to the end of time He must remain the supreme and sufficient test of character; that how they are affected by Him is an infallible touchstone of what people themselves are, and that no one can evade that ordeal. With every man and woman, He said, I come face to face in a narrow place, and, one by one, they must meet the question, "What think ye of Christ?" And if

they simply brush up against Me, and push past Me, and never turn their heads for a further look at what in no way struck them, surely that in itself is the most dreadful of self revelations. If, when Chopin or Beethoven is being played, you fret and fidget, frankly bored until the thing is over, without one word said, you thereby prove conclusively that you possess no ear whatever for real music. And if you can come into contact with the greatest thing in life by far, and remain unimpressed, what can that mean except that you must have little, if any, soul ?

All which each of us had better think out frankly for himself. There is your life, lying before you, as you are actually living it from day to day. Quite obviously, pleasure, and your own interests and ends and comforts, and the like have a big place in it. But what of Jesus Christ ? How largely are your dreams and thoughts and plans and hopes touched and influenced and controlled by Him ? What real part has He in it all ? Browning one day was telling certain people that he had once met Shelley. " And what else ? " they asked, tiring of that subject, and passing on to others, " what else happened to you on that outing ? " " What else ? " he cried, taken aback, " I tell you I saw Shelley, and, of course, in view of that, everything else that day just faded from my mind." It was exactly so that Paul felt about Jesus Christ. He, too, had had his long dreams and his audacious ambitions, his people had given him his chance ; and at the university, as we would say, he had achieved a brilliant success, so that his future was assured, and a professor's chair before long was his for the taking. And that had seemed to him so all-important, fully worth while giving one's whole energies to win. Yet, when He came on Jesus Christ, all that had been so great and splendid suddenly looked dusty and withered and shabby and tashed, dwindled somehow to nothingness. The light that had been in it had blown out, and it lay dull and lustreless. Now that this other possibility had been revealed to him, what could a

sane man do with life but spend it all recklessly in a one-idead, desperate endeavour to gain that, to win Christ, to grow like Christ (ah ! at the best it must be slowly, slowly ; and yet one could always climb at least a little nearer it), to fit oneself with absorbed care in the tremendous hope that some day one might be of some real use to Him, might perhaps somewhat further some of His great plans !

And if you and I are not so held by Christ, not so excited over Him, not so thrilled by the prospect that all that may become ours, if what He has to offer does not interest us much, if other things push Him aside and fill our hearts, then surely we must be so dull and bovine that even God's ingenious kindness can think of no real use for such vacant stupidity !

These people in those early days were really impressed by Christ. Yet some of the conclusions to which they came concerning Him seem very singular and maladroit. Not a few, for instance, reported that He reminded them quite arrestingly of John the Baptist ! One might have been back at the Jordan in the great days that are gone, they said. I had never hoped to be anything like so much impressed again. And yet, when He was preaching, it might have been John himself, the very man to whom I owe so immeasurably. I had the same thrill, the same awe, the same sense of God.

To us John and Jesus seem as far apart as are the healthy but biting austerity of winter, and summer with its blaze of gold and glory. None the less, there must have been something akin in them before these people could have so linked them together in their minds. Probably what they found common to both was that brave note of utter fearlessness and absolute sincerity. John was a great creature of God, a very valiant spirit, over whose grave might have been written what they inscribed above John Knox's, " Here lies one who never feared the face of man." Others might cringe before Herod ; but John dauntlessly hurled his ugly sins full in that flabby, sneering face. It might cost him his

life—in point of fact it did—but what cared he? The man's clean mind was shocked by the moral slackness of the times, and he denounced it in terrible language, that might bring people rallying to one in whom their awed hearts heard God's voice, and whom they saw to be a born leader of men, or just as easily might so inflame their tempers, and so goad them into fury, that the end might be a tragic crime. However that might be, John faced them unafraid, and said his say.

And Christ had the same fearless eyes, and the same love of truth, cost what it might. Such was His sheer daring indeed, that even yet, after two thousand years, we are afraid to follow Him, are too timid really to use and fully to work out that law of life which He laid down, ay, and actually lived. It would be so unusual, we explain; we would feel so awkward and uncomfortable and conspicuous and unlike other people, would be as miserably self-conscious as a woman aware of a hole gaping in her stocking. And so we hedge and compromise and try to forget it, drift along weakly with the accepted customs more or less, tone down Christ's requirements till they match the prevalent way of things or nearly so, or are left by us just a shade better and kinder than the practices of the rest of folk, but nothing glaring or that strikes the eye. Even yet we dare not follow Christ, and fail Him from sheer cowardice! What is all this frightened bleating about intrepid souls who venture to assert that they find a development in Scripture, a gradual progress in it from a less to a more, so that some parts of it are of slighter value than are others, and some bits have become wholly obsolete and out of date? How shocked such flustered people would have been by Christ who dared to correct Moses, to take God's Word into His hands and to say bluntly as He turned the pages, and found passage after passage, this and this, in Scripture though it be, is no longer valid or sufficient! Here and now I abrogate it, rule it out, and give you something better in its place, and with that He scored it

through, and wrote His own new law above it! We admire that in Christ, and in the great men in the days behind us. But if any one speaks so in our time, many grow anxious and disquieted. And, of course, Christ is Christ; while all the rest of us are only we, with our poor stumbling minds.

And yet, as Rainy cried in a great crisis, "The independence of the Church of Christ is not something conceived by our fathers as existing then, but never to exist any more." In every generation we must dare to use the liberty of the sons of God, not merely keep it proudly in a museum or a shrine, like Goliath's sword, but gird it on, and so out against God's enemies now! Yet many of us are frankly afraid of it, look at it askance and with scared eyes, as at a bomb that is only too likely to be let fall with horrible results! Better put the dangerous thing away, and say nothing about it. There are those who believe themselves among the most loyal of His servants, who, had they been alive in Christ's time, would have been the hottest in their anger and resentment against Him: and they would be so still, if He came back again in our day now! It was not little souls that were attracted to the Baptist and to Jesus Christ. It took bigness of nature, and breadth of mind, and a certain valour of soul to understand and to appreciate them.

And yet while there was that obvious resemblance between the two mighty preachers of that day, it was Christ Himself who drew a deep and clean-cut chasm of distinction between Himself and His contemporary. John and his people, He said, are like children playing at funerals. I and My circle are like others at the happier game of marriages. For with all His freely spoken and intense admiration for John, our Lord felt and said that the essential spirits of the two movements were wide as the poles apart, so much so that He roundly declared that any simple soul who had absorbed even a very little of His own mind was further on than was the Baptist with all his magnificence of soul.

Yet we find in the Acts that certain people, and among

them as important a person as Apollos, had to be taken aside by more experienced Christians and asked who had taught them about Christ, with the surprising result that it was discovered that they, there, in the Christian Church, knew little or nothing about Christ, had barely heard of Him, it seemed, and said so frankly. How then did you get the Holy Spirit ? they were asked ; and, a little bewildered, they replied that they had never even heard that there was such a Spirit. In short, it turned out that these were John the Baptist's people, who had strayed somehow into the Christian community. They were noble souls, clean and strong, and helpful; yet unconsciously they misrepresented Christ, because they lacked the real essence of the faith, what was most characteristic in the Master's spirit, that subtle something that was and is the very touch and mark of Jesus. And they had to be taught that better way.

That seems a curious episode. And yet, so far from being unique, these people with their views have had their successors in the Church in every generation with disconcerting consequences. True, they have formed a notable company, splendidly moral and valiantly conscientious, afraid of nothing in the world but sin, ready for any sacrifice, often the iron in its blood that has kept the Church from growing listless and anæmic and unhealthy, not seldom moving to the front as natural leaders to whom the rest of us look up. And yet how often they have proved a hindrance and a stumbling-block and a confusion to men's minds ; have, little though they dreamed of that or would believe it, gravely misrepresented Christ and cost Him much that, but for them, He would have won, because they had not caught His spirit and were really caricaturing Him, using in some respects standards that He explicitly condemned, insisting on a certain hardness and narrowness of thought and life that were typical of the Baptist, but from which Jesus' whole heart recoiled, as from a too sinister reading of this glorious world, a sullen and ungrateful way of dealing with the

gifts and happinesses that God's goodness has thought out for us.

Between John and Myself there is this difference, He said, that his mind lies in shadow and Mine out in the sunshine, that he tends to think of religion as a prohibition and a negation, while to Me it is the filling life with a colour, a richness, a glory that otherwise cannot be even dreamed.

Beyond a doubt Christ taught that the gate that leads to life to be called life is so strait that to enter it one must stoop low and must squeeze through, not without effort and pain ; that the road up which He points is steep and narrow. It is certain that again and again Christ claims unhesitatingly the sacrifice of anything and everything even our dearest, if that be imperilling our moral health, insists that what may be as much to us as our right hand must be cut off ruthlessly, if it is festering and infecting the soul. Of that there is no manner of question. And yet the facts are patent that what scandalized the religious people of His day was that He, claiming to be a Prophet and a Messenger from God, had openly broken with the long line of prophetic tradition, and had so little of asceticism in his mode of life ; and that Christ, well knowing how that was stumbling many, held to it persistently as an essential part of the new spirit He was seeking to introduce into the world. John withdrew to the desert, and that was a symbol that meant much. He called to men to give up this, to renounce that, to lead a bare and austere life, alone with God, who of Himself, so he assured them, would far more than suffice them, as indeed He does. But Jesus played with children, and went to wedding feasts, and entered into people's innocent enjoyments, and lived the whole full round of life, declared that to meet God, to walk face to face with Him, He did not need to escape out of what other folk must do if the world is to continue, but that for Him the workshop was a sanctuary, and the dusty street a holy place ; that the beauties of the wonderful earth, the song of the birds, the haunting merriment of rippling water, the rain-cloud

blowing along the hills, the gaily clad and whispering crowds of flowers lining the highways, the happinesses of our natural relationships, the light on children's faces and the laughter of their voices—that all these things are, not snares, but helps ; not dangers to be shunned, but mercies to be entered into with a grateful heart ; not avenues that lead to evil, but steps that climb up to the heavenly places and the very feet of very God.

To Christ, John's attitude was not really religious. It meant John was afraid of life, and in a panic way surrendered whole provinces of it to evil. And Christ Himself would not, held that all life, apart from actual sin, can be, and ought to be, and must be, cleansed for God, and won to God, and lived for God ; that real religion is as wide and ample as the whole breadth of human experience, and ought to overarch and permeate it all. To Christ the Baptist made religion far too cramped and much too hectoring a thing, a matter of restriction, and of barbed wired fences, and of endless notices, not only warning us back from dangers, but bidding us keep off the grass wherever it looks green and soft, and the cool shade is inviting, limiting us sternly to the hard dusty roadways ; a kind of flustered scold, constantly slapping at her charges, continually nagging them in a shrill, querulous, irritated voice " not to do this " and " not do to that," till people think of it as a bleak business and a wan bleaching of the warm colours natural to life. Yet to Christ religion is a rapture and a glory, as when the sun breaks through on a grey day, and with that the sullen heaving of the waters flashes into a myriad of sunny twinklings dazzling to the eyes ; or when spring comes again, and the dull earth flames out into its yearly miracle.

Think of Paul's metaphor, and he learned it from Christ. Suppose, he says, that we had always lived in darkness, and that somehow into the long monotonous night there burst a dawn, that a strange greyness crept into the eastern skies and spread and grew, as unseen hands pulled back the heavy

curtains of the dark further and further showing all the amazement and the worship of the sunrise, and then the golden ball appeared and climbed the heavens, till the whole width of the blue cloud-flecked sky lay open to us, and the untold beauties of the earth about us stood revealed. Who could have thought that all this could have lain hidden, yet so very near, under the cloak of night? And who could have believed, how could I know or dream, that life, a common life such as falls to the lot of every one, could have held all the possibilities and glories that mine holds since Christ's hand touched it, since He entered into it and filled it full, since the light stealing through the blackness lit my dark soul with all the splendours of a summer's day?

And yet too often it has been the Baptist's mind, not Christ's, that has prevailed within the Church and animated it. It has at times looked frowningly at art, has been afraid of music, has belittled many things, has emptied life of much that it is meant to have. "Don't coop your soul in a corner," Santa Teresa advised; yet too many have done it, have shrunk back out of this and that, nursing a rather delicate and "cloistered virtue" that is fearful of dust and heat, afraid of the pushing and the jostle of the real rough workaday world.

Just what to do and not to do is a continual and teasing problem. Even Paul cannot give any very definite or clear-cut advice. It is a spirit that Christ offers us, not a kind of railway guide that we can turn up in any difficulty, and discover with exactness, all laid down for us in black and white, just what we have to do, and where we ought to change, and how to fit in our connections. Life isn't as simple as that. There is twilight in it; good and evil shade into each other; and it is these misty borderlands that are so dangerous; one may so easily blunder into the enemies' camp, imagining that it is our own quarters. Even Paul hesitates, and cannot be very explicit. He builds up an unanswerable case; and with that, like children playing at sand-castles,

no sooner is it finished than he knocks it over and fashions another, just as convincing on the other side. Every man, he claims, is entitled to deal with God at first hand for himself, to stand up squarely on his own feet and follow his own conscience, is not to be bullied nor browbeaten by another's stupid scruples. So that is that, and we know what to do. And yet already he is taking back with one hand what he gave us with the other. Is one to risk the soul of a poor brother, stupid though he may be, for whom Christ died? Is the thing statable or thinkable? Surely one will unhesitatingly forego much, almost anything indeed, to avoid any chance of that. So we have turned about, it seems, and our road lies the other way after all. But in the end he comes to this of it about all these debatable points. Apart from how others are affected (and that we are bound always to consider), if you cannot indulge in this or that without damage to your soul, without a bad taste being left in the mouth, without a miserable sense that God is somehow farther away, then cut it off at once and give God thanks. Only remember that there are others who can do what is impossible for you, and look God in the eyes and thank Him for it, for this very thing that would stumble you; and it is they, not you, who are the more religious souls. If, said Christ, thy hand offend thee cut it off and cast it from thee! Away with it! Better to enter into life maimed, if need be, than for the soul to die. Yes, far far better! And yet is the most that grace can do for us only to save us indeed, but as maimed and truncated things? Better! But best of all, surely, is it if our whole life can be wholly saved, and we come to God hale and strong, and with both hands to serve Him.

Look again at that picture that hangs in the oratory of your soul. Are you quite sure that it is Jesus Christ, entirely certain it is an authentic Master? Because, in every age, there have been those who account themselves strict Christians, and yet the face that rises up before them when they pray, the character in which they see God's nature

clearest, the life that is the standard that they strive to imitate is, little though they know it, not Jesus Christ's at all, but John the Baptist's.

But there were others who went further and talked boldly of Elijah. That was a marvellous tribute, for it is not easy to exaggerate the place that that great figure held in that generation's mind. You remember that it was Elijah the disciples saw upon the mountain of Transfiguration; and Elijah for whom some thought that Christ was calling on the Cross; and they felt that likely enough he might come. At all events, every one knew that he was to appear again before the world was cleansed from evil, and God's kingdom rose in power. For centuries they had been watching for him, with hearts often sick of waiting. But at times when Jesus was preaching there went a rustle of excitement through the crowds, and a hope lit suddenly in many a face; and men, all a-tremble with excitement, whispered confidently to their neighbours, "This is he, at long last really he!" At which we look at them queerly. For Jesus and Elijah seem exceedingly unlike.

Not in all ways and in all things. Perhaps these people had been in the Temple that day when Christ's eyes blazed into dreadful anger, and He hurled the tables to the ground in His hot scorn, while the wretched traffickers cowering before the terror of it, clutched futilely enough at their precious coins tinkling to the pavement, spilling and scattering into the most inaccessible corners.

There is that element in Christ, and you forget it at your peril. I know that there are those who feel uncomfortable as often as they come in sight of that incident, and protest it cannot be authentic. Yet I can parallel it by many things in my experience. Indeed Christ would have lost my soul altogether long ago had it not mercifully been that His eyes can become very stern, and His mouth set in a determination that won't alter. Not so unlike in all things and all ways.

Yet it was Christ who pointed us to the vast gap yawning

between Elijah and Himself. "Let us burn up their wretched village about their unmannerly ears, the surly dogs," snarled James and John, angry at the gross discourtesy to Christ, "Elijah would have done it." "You know not," Christ broke in, "what manner of spirit ye are of: Elijah might, but I!" And indeed the thing is inconceivable in Him. The truth is that, with all his heroism, the great prophet, in Christ's presence, looks crude and uncouth, a stormy figure bursting in out of a wilder world. He, all alone, could face force unafraid, with never a flicker of the eyelids; yet he himself believed in force, and used it mercilessly when it lay on his own side. When he thought of God's working, the metaphors that rose naturally to his mind were the threatening leap of the lightning, and the long surly crash and growling rumble of the thunder. When God is up and abroad in the world, deep-rooted evils will crack through and topple headlong like huge forests trees when the hurricane tears roaring through the woods. The shuddering earth will heave and shake and split and be remade before men's dizzy eyes. His anger will flame through the land, glutting itself upon destruction. Wrath, suddenness, immediacy, terror, something open and obvious and cataclysmic and tremendous, that is the mark of God, he thought. And it was only slowly he was brought to see that a still small voice can carry farther than much din and noise and tumult; and that spiritual forces, ineffective though they seem, are in reality far more potent than the material things, comfortably solid and substantial though they look, on which our hearts are so apt to depend; that the swift revolutions that we engineer are wont to collapse in a recoil of hideous reaction, and that it is God's way of it, with truth stealing into the world unnoticed, secretly, slipping from heart to heart as the infection of a brave man's courage spreads to others round him, that really makes for progress, gets things done.

It is immensely difficult, heartily to credit that as Jesus did. Once on a day, when the battalion was trudging back

to be thrown into a great battle, we passed a garden, where three priests were walking up and down reading their offices, and my heart rose up angrily in a hot protest. What were they doing there, these full-grown men, skulking in safety, and leaving strangers to defend their land for them? If they had looked across the wall, and answered mildly, "And do you think then our prayers have no value?" I suppose that, stammering, I would have stuttered out, "Prayer! Oh well, yes! No doubt; in a way; yes, of course!" Yet my mind cried aloud to me that it really thought they would have been of much more practical use up at the firing-line, and with a rifle in their hands! It is not easy to avoid that foolishness. "I can only believe in a God who does something," Froude said to Carlyle once; and the latter, old and tired and daunted for the moment, answered sadly, "And He does nothing!" Certainly He does nothing in our noisy, vulgar, self-advertising, hustling way. And because we have accustomed ourselves to that kind of thing, accepted it as the sign-manual of real effectiveness, we miss it, and are staggered, and lose heart.

Even John the Baptist wavered just on that account. When they flung him into his dungeon, his heart had laughed at them, almost in their very faces. For he knew that the Messiah had appeared, that in a very little while these haughty creatures would be tumbled from their eminence; that there would come the sound of footsteps hurrying along the passage, and the door be thrown back, and the light flash suddenly into his eyes blinded with the long darkness; that they would knock off his shackles, and lead him out, a free man, into a wonderful world with righteousness upon the throne. And it might come at any hour; and his tense heart kept listening, listening, for what he knew must be! Yet the days heaped themselves to weeks, and the slow weeks grew into months, and nothing happened; only the same strange rumours filtered down to him of how Christ still delayed; of how men had begun to look at Him a second time, no longer with the

first assurance, but with an uneasy doubt beginning to show plainly in their eyes ; of how the tides were turning. And brooding there in the dark and idleness the strong heart almost broke, " Go," he said, " ask Him, definitely. Tell us once for all, Art Thou He who should come ? Or have we too, like our fathers so often, followed a mere vain dream and lit a futile hope that, flickering a moment, has gone out and left us in a colder, denser darkness than before ? " He, too, was looking for the cataclysm, the upheaval, for something solid, material, obvious, crashing in upon a startled world that couldn't help but see it.

It came to Christ, that sudden disaffection, like a blow on the face, yet He answered very patiently. I wonder what John made of our Lord's signs, of His reply about the lepers being cleansed, and the blind seeing, and the poor having the gospel preached to them. I wonder if he understood, or if he grew impatient and despairing. For spiritual things do look so much less real somehow than others, so slow, so tame, so maddening to us in our hot eagerness that wants to see everything now. We can do nothing, we say sometimes, we can only pray. That, we feel, is a terribly precarious second best. So long as we can fuss and work and rush about, so long as we can lend a hand, we have some hope, but if we have to fall back upon God, ah, then things must be critical indeed !

The whole mood of the age is to turn from the Church, to push it irritably aside. If it would take political action, or do something, something definite and real, something that one can see and touch and handle ! But all this talk about men's souls and unseen powers ! Oh, get out of the way, they cry, and since you can't do anything, don't bother us with idle chattering that comes to nothing !

And who are we to criticize them sternly for that mood ? In our own spiritual life do we not find it strangely difficult to take God simply at His word, and to rely on that implicitly? Do we not also call, irritably enough, for proofs and evidence

before we will believe ? Do we not lose heart almost on the instant, if we cannot find them ? Do we not constantly forget that vivid metaphor of Bunyan, that while it is sin's blustering way to hurl water upon the fire, that while temptations are dishearteningly obvious, God's grace is like oil dropped in secretly and from behind ; and at times, because we cannot see Him, our faint hearts imagine that He has deserted us ; because we note no progress, we conclude that we have failed. Ours is too apt to be that very rudimentary faith that can believe only when and just so far as it can see, and which, when it does not, grows at once sullen towards God, and sour in its uncharitable thoughts of Him.

The fact is that to this day most of us in the Church are Elijahites, not Christians. We still believe mainly in fuss and noise and crowding and organization and machinery. If things drag, we evolve some other type of meeting, add one more to the already deafening intricacy of whirling wheels. And when it too is whirling with the rest we feel more happy. There may be no spiritual outcome whatsoever, but we are pleasantly tired, and there is a wind blowing in our faces and so we have the sense something is being done. So long as we are hot and perspiring, are talking and meeting, are bustled and rushed, we feel that things are happening, for we trust in efficiency and busyness, and a certain material capacity far more than in the Holy Ghost ; energy and organization, that we feel is what will bring us through. And so

> " All day the wheels are droning turning ;
> Their wind comes in our faces,
> Till our hearts turn, our heads with pulses burning,
> And the walls turn in their places :
> And all day the iron wheels are droning,
> And sometimes we could pray,
> Oh, ye wheels (breaking out in a mad moaning)
> Stop ! be silent for to-day."

Ah ! but we don't believe in silence, have forgotten the healing of stillness, and the power of worship, don't know the spirit we are of, and fill God's House with such a din and

clamour that His voice cannot reach us even in His holy place. We are Elijahites, not Christians.

Still others took a wiser line. Who is it, they said? He is far and away the greatest teacher who ever came into my ken. No one I ever heard, no one I ever read, so thrills my soul and stirs my mind and wins my heart; no, they said shyly, not even the Scriptures. I take down my Isaiah or Hosea, or even Jeremiah, greatest of God's prophets, and it is old and familiar and no longer bites with its first freshness into my jaded mind. But this man comes to me like a new revelation, like a word straight from God. When He is preaching, God seems very near, grows wonderfully lovable; and the horizons of life leap out upon every side, and it lies there a far richer and ampler thing than I had known, and sin—my sins are so disgusting that they nauseate me. This is to me a messenger of the divine. They say that God has fallen dumb these days, no longer speaks to us, that the canon is closed. But if I had my way, I would reopen it and put this man alongside of the prophets, for he also is a prophet, ay, and the best of them to me.

These were bold words then, though we all echo them now, know that Christ is the greatest of all teachers, that we have learned far more from these slim pamphlets that we call the gospels than from all human literature beside. If we were wrecked, as Ruskin said, and could take only one book with us to our solitude, what would it be? For his part he chose Matthew. Yet Christ is frankly disappointed if that is all that we can say. His eyes cloud, and His face looks almost vexed, and He turns to those who know Him better, and, Whom do you say that I am? He asks. These others know Me only as the greatest teacher. And truly that is not enough. What does it profit us to know how lovable God is unless our hearts are really loving Him, to see how great a thing our life may be, if actually we continue in the old mean ways; to realize how ugly our sins are, if we remain in them as before? To know is only the beginning. What is coming of

it in our character and soul? Is it breaking our sins? Is it ennobling our lives? Is it lifting us above ourselves and making other, bigger, better men and women of us? Ask any one in the New Testament what Jesus did for him, and he will answer you at once—He saved me! And when you, too, are asked, Whom do you say Christ is? believe me that you know Him only dimly and inadequately and afar off unless you also can reply, awed, humble, grateful, wondering, yet very sure, He is my Saviour!

VI

CHRIST'S APPEAL TO HUMAN CHIVALRY

"He knew all men, and required no evidence from any one about human nature; well did He know what was in human nature."—JOHN ii. 25 (Moffatt).

THAT is a claim that time has abundantly justified. No one ever knew these intricate hearts of ours in every shadowy nook and cranny of them, like Jesus Christ. Epictetus, you remember, tells us that when his teacher was lecturing on motives and the like, the class to a man sat hot-faced and uncomfortable, each of them feeling confusedly that things had grown too personal and pointed. For this being depicted was evidently his own portrait—there could be no manner of doubt of that—and painted too with such merciless fidelity and skill that nobody could fail to recognize so speaking a likeness. And they glanced at their fellows guiltily, with some anger indeed; for somebody, they felt, must have been giving things away, only to find that same detected look in every pair of eyes! And who of us, as we read the Gospels, does not feel, often and often, that He is looking straight at him, is reading from his character; that here is One who knows us through and through, with an uncanny thoroughness, before which the usual safeguards that, partly from shyness and reserve, and partly, perhaps, from less worthy motives, we run up instinctively to seclude and shield ourselves from one another, simply melt away; and Christ deals with us, not as we appear to be, not as sometimes we want to be, far less as what we

would like to be supposed to be, but in blunt fact, and as we actually are.

A day will dawn, He said once, when every secret thing will be revealed. And, whenever they found themselves in His presence, many felt that it had come. He looked at them, and their inmost thoughts seemed to be shouting themselves aloud for every one to hear; lay, of a sudden, as in this very passage, open and obvious and in the full blaze of day. He asked a question; and the confused tangle of their motives began to grow clear, often with results that shamed and disconcerted them. For they had not realized that they were actuated by such squalid and unseemly things.

A cluster of excited men burst in, dragging along with them a poor, shrinking creature, caught, as they kept shouting noisily, almost exultantly, in the very act of sin. Now, they told each other triumphantly, they would discover whether these ugly stories of Christ's shameful clemency towards open sinners were really true. They were to test Christ—that was their idea, to embarrass and confuse Him. But His eyes looked quickly from that cowering form, from that hot, frightened face, from those terrified eyes, to theirs, so cold and hard and stony. Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone, He said quietly. That was all. But somehow at that one swift searching glance of His, things long ago forgotten emerged out of their graves; impure thoughts, and unclean wishes, and nastinesses that had crawled across their souls, leaving a trail of slime; and conscience was awake, had leapt at them with angry denunciation, jeering at them in hot scorn. You, it cried, you, to pose as outraged guardians of virtue! What if God dealt with you, as you now do towards her! And, stung to the quick, one by one they slipped away; till, when Christ raised Himself, they were all gone, even the youngest and the most self-confident. His eyes, said John, musing on Jesus Christ, were as a flame of fire. When He turned and looked at you, your whole heart lay bare. Ay, at a

glance of His, things written there in invisible ink, things nobody suspected in us, things of which we ourselves were hardly conscious leapt out into distinctness. And we, too, know that feeling well, have often experienced how in Jesus' presence all things lie naked and open to the sight of Him with whom we have to do. "Come," panted a woman breathless from running, gasping out her astonishment while still far off, "Come, see a man who told me all that ever I did, is not this the Christ?" Of us, too, this Master has that same amazing knowledge, deals with us face to face, and very soul to very soul.

But all that being so, what is Christ's verdict on us? How did men and women strike Him? As He lived among them, taught them, healed them, there in their midst, what was His reading of humanity?

Certainly this comment of the evangelist sounds a little sinister. Yet, perhaps, if we could come to the Gospels for the first time, nothing in them would strike us sooner or more forcibly than the hugeness of Christ's faith in man, than the splendid assumptions concerning us on which He builds His teaching, than the honouring way in which He takes it for granted as a thing self-evident, that we are august beings who will of course respond to high appeals, thrill to the chance of service and sacrifice, be, not intimidated, but captured irresistibly by a call to what is costly and difficult and dangerous, to that for which one's whole life must be paid down resolutely and with no discount. Always Christ asks these vast things with a quiet confidence that has no fear of a refusal. Always He treats us as people who have that in us, who are built on these big lines. Nothing so reveals a man as the things that he assumes, as the axioms he takes for granted. And this is very noticeable about Jesus Christ, that just as He never pauses to prove there is a God, because God is far too real and near and obvious to Him for that, is indeed a postulate, as Euclid used to say, something beyond and before proof, that must be taken for granted, or else

life is entirely unintelligible, and reasonable thought comes to an end, so His whole plan and teaching rest on this as their very foundation, that in dealing with any one you can safely count on this, must indeed do so if you are to read the man aright, that soiled and broken weakling though he may look and be, this, too, is a heart fitted for high and perilous spiritual adventure, a soul that can be roused to fling itself away in a generous enthusiasm, in a daring splendour of gallantry that will take other people's breath away ; that in the shabbiest of us all, shambling tattered and dirty and unkempt through a pitiful life, there is concealed somewhere in that most unlikely hiding-place something glorious and clean and very noble ; and that that something is the most basal and elemental thing in him of all. "Man is a plant of heavenly growth, and not of earth," said Plato. And to Christ in every one, however sordid, there is something of God, some aptitude and capability of spending life courageously after God's generous unselfish way, some possibility of great things now and of growth into the very best at last. If that be not so, Christ has pitched things far too high, and His whole plea is blunted, and His dream goes out. Always He bases everything on this, that man is a great creature.

It is strange it should be so, for his own experience of humanity does not make a bonnie story. Recall it all again —the coldness and aloofness of His own family, to whom His dreams and claims seemed only the pathetic irresponsibilities of craziness. Don't listen to Him, they implored, with a hot flush upon their faces and pain in their eyes. Poor soul! He doesn't mean it, doesn't realize what He is saying ; we will take Him away, and shut Him up, and keep Him safely, and no one will be worried by Him and His ravings any more! His loneliness in His own town! It was those nearest Muhammad who were his first followers. But there was no one from Nazareth among the disciples. He was liked there, but not really understood. The fickleness of the crowds gaping after Him and quickly tiring of Him,

drifting off to something newer and more interesting; the callous, unbelievable ingratitude of the multitudes for whom in their days of need and sorrow He had spent Himself so eagerly, and yet when at last that long roar of "Barabbas" died away, and Pilate said, "And who for Christ?" not one voice answered. "And who for Christ?" cried Pilate again, taken aback; and still there was only silence. The ghastly fact, that has shamed mankind ever since, that all the disciples broke and fled, that not even one stood by Him, till Celsus breaks out into scornful laughter, asking with truth was ever the chieftain of a robber band treated so scurvily by his associates—it was a grim experience that might have made anybody cynical and bitter, what else indeed could it possibly do? And yet Christ faced it all, passed through it all, endured it all, and died still holding to His obstinate faith that man is a great creature, chivalrous and big and gallant, looked at each commonplace person He met as at the raw material out of which He knew that He could weave the very character of very God.

Every one knows that something happened in Shakespeare's life that turned him for the time into little better than a snarling misanthrope. To start with he, too, had had so exquisite a sympathy with every one that he could look, and make us see, through anybody's eyes. Till Falstaff is not just a swilling, lying braggart, but a fellow-man one likes; and Macbeth not a mere treacherous villain, but a strong soul caught in the quicksands of temptation, and, struggle desperately how he might, sucked down and still down, there before our very eyes till we are near to screaming at the horror of it. To Shakespeare, too, man was a lordly creature. But midway through his days something happened that soured his heart into a passion of contempt of us till his whole soul seethed over in a terrific lava torrent of sheer scorn! How he lashes at us, loathes us, shudders with disgust at thought of us, at this Man he had once so loved and trusted and admired. And the mood never really passed,

though the first rush of its blind fury died away, and the gale sank as evening fell, and through the scudding clouds the moon rose calm and clear, and the stars showed through in blinks here and there, wonderful constellations everywhere. Still, is it not a sobering, even a dreadful reading of humanity? But Christ passed through His disappointing life and awful death steadfastly holding to His own far happier one. And yet, what did man do for Him? Well did He know what is in human nature—the very worst. Might He, too, not have flamed out into a redhot invective and denunciation, proving it by hard, unchallengable facts at every step. What did he do for Me? He took My all and gave Me nothing; he deserted Me, betrayed Me, sold Me, hated Me with a blind hate, he lied Me to My death, he failed Me, though he knew that I was innocent; to save his own comfort and place, he crucified Me; he laughed up into My dying face. Man! I know man, that crawling, stinging, loathsome blot upon God's earth, better away!

Yet no such thought so much as blew across His mind. He died still sure that man is a great being. He is valorous, He felt, and just because the cause seems doomed, will rally to it; that is his big way. He is chivalrous; and this Cross of Mine will touch him, win him, rush his heart! And when the thief turned to Him there in His agony and shame, "I knew it," Christ cried, "I was sure of it; and I am justified"; and died content.

Sir Walter Scott tells us that all through his life he returned again and again, with the old avidity for it unimpaired, to a re-reading of the *Vicar of Wakefield*. And this, he explains, because it "contrives so well to reconcile us to human nature." When something he had done or said had hurt his self-respect, or when other people seemed to have grown small and petty and exasperating, when the buzz of the blue flies of scandal, fastening greedily on every sore, was in his ears, when for some reason or other his genial nature felt fretted and raw, was inclined to flame up into a

hot blaze of irritation, he would take down the well-thumbed book again and, as he read, would feel his mind becoming mellower and his old faith in human nature flooding back, till once more he was sure as ever that with all his faults and failings, man is a lovable being worthy of the best that we can give, was ashamed of his hard, crabbed thoughts and petulance, was reconciled to human nature. But nobody does that for us like Jesus Christ, makes us so look up to our fellows, or feel so proud to be a man. Crabbe Robinson once said, oddly enough about that selfish creature Goethe, that, if one had never lived, that life would convince him that to live is worth while. Take in Christ's glorious conception of what it means to be a man, what any of us can become and do, and we shall know it is worth while to be alive, an immense and glorious adventure. Look at His staggering promises to any one who will accept them. These are not just splendid words. That is His estimate of you and me; that is what He sees in us, overlaid and hidden away as yet, but still there in germ, though to attain it in fullness our whole character will need to be remodelled. Or still more, think of the claims He makes upon us. Take them in your hand and think out that Christ asks this of me, and your heart will laugh aloud in sheer, happy pride. For evidently He trusts us so hugely, this wonderful Master, He believes in us so utterly, He dares to ask this and this from you and me, and seems so sure we will not fail Him. Remember the hopes, the hungry and audacious hopes, He harbours for us; hopes, too, that are never satisfied, for they keep growing ever bigger. Another thing done, Kingsley used to say, and now for the next. So, when with toil and set teeth and long patience we at last scramble to where we had thought it inconceivable that we could ever really be, Christ smiles at us encouragingly, but already His eyes are on some loftier peak, and His hand is reaching out to help us up that even steeper face of sheer impossibility, and He is sure that this, too, we can manage. No one can miss that note.

He speaks to a gathering of ordinary folk who, laying aside for the moment their drab little tasks, had run out to hear the popular prophet of the hour without much spiritual interest perhaps, and looking at them you and I would have said they were dull and lumpish and rather stupid people, with never a thought beyond the usual, sordid, little dreams of comfort and the like. But He treats them as heroic beings, likely to respond to the loftiest appeal. He calls people to rally to Him, and what is His inducement? The politicians seem to hold it as a fact of nature that you must bribe folk, promising them something for themselves if you would have them rally to you. Nothing else would interest them much, they feel. But Christ resents that as an insult to human nature. And, for His part, tells not only, not so much, of the golden lands that lie beyond the seas, but of the glory of the wrestle with the hurricanes, with one's breath caught away, and the spray stinging in one's eyes; and the frail vessel burying itself time after time in the huge curling billows, every one of which seems to be overwhelming it; and yet, it rights again, battered and staggering, with its decks awash and scuppers streaming, but still carrying on; tells us that expecting, it seems, eyes to light, and hearts to glow, and hands to leap out of themselves for such a chance, like Drake's men talking to the youths of the seaports of Devon, or like a lad home from the half starvation at some Scottish University, whose stories entice half the school to follow him, talks of the difficulties that discipleship must mean, the dangers to be faced, the sacrifices to be made; goes so far as to say frankly, You have seen a man upon his way to Calvary, well, it will be like that! You too will have a cross to carry every day; you too will meet everywhere with the same hard, unsympathetic eyes; you too will often be alone and utterly unfriended, save by Me and God; you too, in every sin and fault and weakness of yours, will have to be crucified and slowly and inexorably done to death. It is no easy path to which I point you: no

task for cowards or poltroons I ask of you ; but one that will strain every ounce of strength, and often seem too hard for a frail human heart to face and bear. It will hurt, hurt terribly ; it will cost, cost everything you have. And He said that to win them ! For it never occurred to Him that they might turn away or skulk off out of the adventure. The danger, the difficulty, the risk of it will appeal to them, He said, and bring them flocking to Me. So He reads human nature.

At a critical moment in the French Revolution, when everything seemed lost, Barbaroux dared to cry for six hundred men prepared to die. An impossible claim, you say. Yet no. For far away in Marseilles, largely out of it all we would have thought, they heard it, and six hundred did lay down their happy days, did leave their homes, did actually start for Paris, carrying their lives openly in their hands to toss them away when the hour struck,—Some one is needed as a sacrifice, well, here are we prepared for that—did doggedly march the long six hundred miles, on and on to the place of doom, beating out with their steadily tramping feet that "Marseillaise" which nobody can hear without his heart exulting, and the blood racing faster in his veins.

And Jesus Christ looks out over a world engrossed sordidly enough with petty interests, and calls hopefully to us, to all of us, to break with all that seems most natural, instinctive, ineradicable ; to be done with thoughts of self and comfort and such-like smallnesses, to use our life greatly, big-heartedly, heroically. Live for Me, work for Me, die for Me, give Me your all, He cries. It will mean peril and sacrifice, but what is that to lofty spirits such as yours ! I warned you, Paul once wrote to some of his friends, that life would knock us about, and if it is doing it, well, what of that ? He learned that from Christ, with that ringing cry of His He used so often, " Courage, lads ! " Steady there ; you aren't going to fail, to snivel and whimper, to break into a bleating of self-pity or an angry bellow of hurt pride, are going to see it

through with your heads up and steady eyes! So grandly does He think of us.

Nor did Christ ever repent when fellowship with Him led His friends into hazardous places and dark days. We know, indeed, that if one can talk of our Lord's besetting temptation, it was this; that the part of God's will that Christ found hardest was to hurt His dear ones. That was why at Cæsarea Philippi He flung off Peter with such sudden vehemence. The pain in loved eyes was to Christ far the most difficult of things to face. Yet He never spared them; never let them off with a mere second best, because the real best would be sore to bear. Mazzini was haunted, till the thing became an obsession, by the thought of the homes that he had shattered, and the hearts that he had broken, and the lives he had cut short, working for Italy, could not get out of his mind the picture of those who had given their loved ones at his call, now left empty-hearted with the winds wailing drearily through vacant places in their very souls. But Jesus Christ leads on unflinchingly, however steep the way grow, and however huge the sacrifice demanded, always assuming that, however it may hurt us, we would rather be here than out of it; that the gifts that we covet are a clean conscience and truth seen and followed, and duty done; and that for these our hearts are proud and grateful, let the cost be what it may.

What a relief it is to pass to this from the long gallery of portraits of us drawn by the popular novelists, which, in the mass, are so painfully unflattering. So often there are a weak mouth and lustful eyes; so usually life is represented as a mere vulgar scuffle of callous selfishness and ugly passion! At the very moment when the pulpit has fallen strangely silent about sin, fiction can talk of little except evil, not indeed viewed as sin, but apparently as the invariable ways of a peculiarly repulsive insect, which it can't help, poor thing; and there is no manner of use expecting from it anything except the nastinesses natural to it. Balzac is famous for

his minute knowledge of humanity, so excited voices tell us. And what is his verdict on us ? Ask Anatole France ! " He showed with extreme precision all the functions of the claw, the jaw, and the stomach, all the habits of the man of prey." Jaw, and claw, and stomach ; always these, but of trace of a soul, hardly a reminder ! And is that really adequate, an honest picture of a man ? No, says Christ boldly, it is not.

And all the facts are with Him. There is hardly a laughing lassie who, when her time comes, will not for love's sake go down into the valley of the shadow of death with a heart unafraid. The war leapt at us from the darkness, and in every obscure boy, behind his cheerful commonplaceness, were discovered gallantries that thrill the soul. In ordinary times all that would have lain hidden away unnoticed, unsuspected, unbelieved. But Christ knew it was there. And Christ was right. Yet Hardy, it seems, was once asked why he had so seldom drawn a good woman, and replied, " Because I have as seldom met one." That is not realism, but a lie ; not art, but a gross libel upon human nature ; is to be guilty of the silliness of taking the stinking garbage of the divorce courts as a faithful picture of life in the mass. " There are those," said Meredith, " who fancy that they are at nature's depths when they are wallowing in its muddy shallows." Soak your mind in stuff like that and you will come to take it for granted that you spring from a sickly breed, that evil is your natural element, that it can't matter much how you put through a life so squalid at the best. A little less or more of dirt can make no material difference. Who cares how this mean grub crawls through its trivial career ! But look at Jesus Christ, live near Him, and His enormous trust in you will thrill, inspire, ennoble you, will make you set your teeth grimly, resolving that if He thinks this of me, then please God, I mean to climb nearer it before the end. " Let us," says Clement, " strive that we may be crowned ; and should we not all be able to obtain the crown, let us at least come close to it."

Christ's was by far the most original of minds, and that along various lines. And while the wonder and the glory of His discovery of what God really is has somewhat blinded our dazzled eyes to all the others, yet each of them would of itself give Him a place alone. And not least of them is this steady sense of His of the greatness of human nature, which has entirely changed the situation, shown us that we are bigger creatures than we thought, set us a higher standard, made us feel that much that had contented us as good enough for us just will not do.

And that brings us to the other side of this same truth, for it is only the other side of it—the blackness of the shadow that to Christ's eyes lies on human sin. It is said of more than one distinguished physician that, standing before a portrait painted by Sargent, he started, seeing at once on the canvas, what had eluded him in the living face of his patient, clear evidences of some disease he had not noticed in the man, or that had baffled diagnosis, and that, calling on him again, he found that the painter was right, had seen what no one else had seen, but what was really there. And so no one can read the Gospels without realizing how much sin Christ saw in us, whom others count respectable and seemly, and how His whole soul shuddered at the horror of it. You and I, who have always lived in it, have grown so accustomed to it that we hardly notice it, except in heinous cases, and as a rule don't bother about it very greatly, even when we do. Newman thought that our one chance was to be shocked by sin. We are not shocked by it, or hardly at all. Jesus was inexpressibly. Apart altogether from infamous things, that such as you and I should be self-centred and proud and greedy and difficult to reconcile, seemed to Him simply tragic, was an agony that He could hardly bear, so that He had to fling away His life upon the chance of changing us and making that impossible. And that is what draws great souls to Him. Browning, for instance, tells us that what won him for Christ was this, that while others

tried to soothe his angry conscience, and kept urging that, really, things were not nearly so bad as he was making out, Christ looked him in the eyes and told him bluntly that he was a desperate sinner, worse, much worse, even than he realized. And at that, queerly enough as you might think, the man was not discomfited but heartened. Here at last, he felt, is one who understands and knows the facts. And since His desperate diagnosis is so accurate, may not His optimism also justify itself even in me. Well does He know what is in human nature, and yet, knowing the worst, He has still confident hope.

But most of us are taken aback by the severity of Jesus' strictures, look up at Him wonderingly, frankly puzzled, feeling that surely there is here monstrous exaggeration. We may not be all that we ought to be, still we are decent and clean-living folk, at whom no one can point a finger. And yet to Jesus it is tragedy and failure. Sometimes He is very tender, speaks of us as lost—a sheep strayed on the hills, a child wandered and crying in some vast city's streets; or we are ailing and unwell, even delirious, He feels; and once at least He says we must be off our heads—must be—to live as we are doing. Sometimes He blazes out into a terrible intensity of clean tremendous anger. But, tender or severe, is not the pain in His eyes, and the shudder of His soul, a wonderful tribute to the bigness of human nature? Sin is, indeed, sin; always and everywhere, to Christ, a thing disgusting. But that you and I, designed so evidently as He feels for mighty ends, and with it in us to climb so high and far, that you and I should be so soiled and stained, it is that that appals Him. Out on the streets it is all very well, though even there unpleasant to sensitive natures, that there should be dust and glare and din and jostle and the raucous cries of vendors offering their vulgar shabby wares; but your heart is no common roadway, but was raised as a Temple for God. And that it should be filled with sights and sounds like that is a depravity and blasphemous. The acuteness of

one's sense of sin depends on one's conception of humanity. It is because we think of ourselves as trivial creatures, because we all corroborate each other in mean ways, because we take ourself as the standard of what an ordinary passable man is meant to be, that we can rest content enough with only this. But Christ's thought of us and of our possibilities is so high and honouring that what we are seems to Him nothing less than a profanity. We have stood gazing at some creature of the wilds, a thing all speed and grace and energy in its natural state, but caught in youth and tamed, and penned into a paddock, grown now fat and flabby and lethargic, a pitiful travesty of what God meant that it should be, what it had in it, and still has, to be. So sadly did Christ look at those who lived for the world's poor prizes. Where are the fire, the spirituality, the heroism with which God endowed them, that they have sunk so low as to be pleased with this poor selfish way of using life ? How can they throw away a human soul and all its infinite possibilities only for this ? It is because we are God's children, and can live after God's way, that it hurt Christ so cruelly to see us small and tempery and irritable. "Mayest thou never know, ill-starred one, who thou art," cried she who knew the hideous truth to Œdipus caught fast unknowingly, poor soul, in an horrible life of shame. Not so, thinks Christ. We must know, must be wakened from our stupor, must be told how greatly bigger than we know we are, must have it forced in on our minds how dreadful is our satisfaction with our present ways. The revelation will be stunning when it comes, that we, God's sons, have lived like this !

> "Ah ! not the nectarous poppy lovers use,
> Nor daily labour's dull Lethean spring,
> Oblivion in lost angels can infuse
> Of the soiled glory, and the trailing wing."

Yet it must come if we are to be saved from the mad self-depreciation of our way of life. And Christ cried it aloud for all to hear. It is against the glorious background of his

sureness of the nobility of human nature that sin looms up so ghastly and so tragic. Katharine Mansfield, that gifted creature, seems to have lived surrounded by the adulation of a little circle who would fain have had her believe that she takes rank among the very greatest of English writers of all time, which, with all her art, she certainly does not. But she herself was too big to be deceived, because she had a higher standard for herself than those too lenient critics. They talked about the cleverness of her plots, the vividness of her style, and such-like things ; but when she lay dying she burst out that she was ashamed of her stories. " There is not one of them that I dare show to God." That is the test Christ set for us, which He believed that we could face, if we would only try, and take His help ; and that is why He is so honouringly dissatisfied with what we are as yet, why sins of ours that do not vex us wound His very soul. This life of ours is well enough, as we and others judge, conforms not ill to the prevalent customs, but we have to show it to God. And how will it look there ? Yet we seem satisfied with it ! That is the horror. And if we fail, if we are choosing foolishly, when we stand before Christ at last, perhaps there will be no anger, only a misery of pity and of sadness on His face ; and as He lets us have the hell which we insisted upon choosing, and at which our hands clutch joyously, it may be very brokenly He says, " I thought that you were greater than you are, am still sure that you had it in you, you who have made only this of life, to grow like God."

Well, what are we to do about it, you and I ? Sometimes we feel that Christ's tremendous estimate of us is true, that we are vastly bigger than our record, nobler than anybody knows, are like a dumb man who cannot give expression to the thoughts that rise in him ; feel grateful to Christ for that word of His, " When he came to himself." For this we are is not our real self ; but that last is quite another, to which somehow we cannot attain. No doubt it is I who does it,

says Paul, yet it is not I, not the real I. That hates and loathes what this counterfeit self keeps doing.

Sometimes we push His promises away as manifestly not for us who are not built upon that scale at all, as a wild overestimate with small resemblance to the actual facts. There was always, we say in such moods, a certain uncritical eagerness of spirit about Christ which, through sheer generosity, was apt to mislead Him. A few Greeks ask for an interview, and He sees the whole world being saved. That was two thousand years ago, and yet look at it still! His followers work some cures and "I was watching Satan tumbling headlong out of heaven" is His characteristically hopeful and enthusiastic verdict on their tour; and yet is evil really dethroned unto this day? And in us He caught certain gleams and glints of better things that made Him think too highly of us, hope for what can never be. I cannot live the life to which He points; I cannot meet His claims in those tremendous promises; I, for one, am far smaller than He seems to think.

But Christ knows all our weaknesses, and we know that He knows. And it is so knowing that He makes the promises. Without Me, He said once in a very heartening word, you can do, not fairly well, though not enough, but just nothing at all. And it is on that basis that He makes His covenant with us. You are gallant creatures, but life to a certainty will beat you if you face it by yourselves. And if it has, then He is not disproved, but justified; is not at all surprised that apart from Him we have not done better. On the contrary He knew how it would be, and warned us. He does not feel that here are new and sinister facts that compel Him to revise His thinking, that make Him say, "Oh well! I had not realized that any one could be so dull and stupid, and of course anything I have said does not apply to you." No, what He holds is this, that there are splendours dormant in your nature; but you need something to call them out, to waken them, to make them

live. "I," He says, "am that something; and I know that I can make new creatures of you; I am prepared to prove it, to take you as the test, to stand or fall by how it works out in your case. You can shake off your weaknesses, you can climb to the heights at which I point; you, with My hand to steady you! I guarantee it."

Surely that faith of His in us is in itself sufficient to make all the difference. For always who is it that has helped you most? Has it not been those who believed in you? Perhaps there may be few such left. The light of expectation may have died out of the most friendly and hopeful eyes; and you yourself may have lost heart. Ah! but there is still One whose faith in you has never wavered. And how wonderful it is that that one should be Jesus Christ!

When Sir Henry Jones was a little lad he had no thought of anything except to put life through like all the other boys around him. And it was a woman's faith in him that made him the tremendous influence he grew to be, a faith that at first met with no response whatever in the boy himself, that had to shake his mind awake, to overcome a stubborn inertia, to give him some confidence in himself, to reveal to him the possibilities of life, to provide everything, to coax out into being what she felt was there. And Jesus Christ has a like obstinate faith in you and me that seems to have nothing to justify it; and yet it patiently works on, undauntedly believes in spite of endless disappointments, time after time rouses us, shames us, startles us, encourages us, provides all that we need, is openly happy in our small successes, and very faithful where we trip and fall, still strangely sure that what it sees in us is there, and can work into open fact. It was a wonderful dream God dreamed, Christ says, when He created you; it was a stately being that was in His mind when you were fashioned; and I can make you all He meant that you should be.

VII

HOW CHRIST'S DAY-DREAMS CAME TRUE

"I am come in order that."—JOHN x. 10.

IS it not extraordinary that with the thin Gospels as, practically speaking, our only records, we know Jesus Christ as well as we do! In part, I think, that is due to His habit of thinking aloud, whereby He often left open a door through which we can catch glimpses far into His wonderful mind. Occasionally we can watch Him feeling about for the expression that best fits his thought. "To what," He says musingly, "shall I liken the Kingdom of God, and with what comparison shall I compare it?" and then He fastens on some simile. Sometimes we overhear Him talking to God, lost in such rapt communion with Him that He has forgotten there are bystanders. Frequently, with the honouring confidence of utter friendship, He opens His whole mind to us, and tells us all about His hopes and aims and purposes, what He would like to do with life, and why He feels it has been given Him. That last is most illuminating. If you would know yourself, watch your day-dreams. For nothing is so self-revealing. What you are has been largely fixed for you by circumstance, without your consent being asked or given. What you would be, if the ordering of things were in your own hands, that is the real you. It is our day-dreams that are our true prayers. At the Mercy Seat we ask, with more or less earnestness, for what we know we ought to seek. But it is the things to which our hearts keep breaking away of themselves with

eager outstretched hands we really beg from God. "Would you know a man?" says Marcus Aurelius. "Keep your eyes upon the things he aims at."

And Christ too had His day-dreams and ambitions. As a boy, though He knew that He had to go into the workshop, no doubt, like other boys, He had taken His life into His hand, and looked at it, and thought out what He would like best to make of it, if the chance ever offered. And long after, when that came, He felt that the dreams that had always haunted Him were God's voice calling Him; and He rose up, left all, and followed where His audacious visions led. Often He speaks of them, has a way of saying "I am come" for this or that, letting slip what, out of all the infinite possibilities of life, He had chosen as His goals. And as we listen, we look up at Him with ever-increasing reverence. For it is all so big and brave, so generous and unselfish.

"If there were dreams to sell,
What would you buy?
Some cost a passing bell,
Some a light sigh
That shakes from life's fresh crown
Only a rose leaf down.
If there were dreams to sell,
What would you buy?"

Christ tells us His dreams frankly; and though He knew that the cost of them was the Cross, paid down the whole price unfalteringly, would accept nothing less from life; and in the end, He says, they all came true.

That, perhaps, startles us. For to us His life looks like a flower suddenly snapped across. He was so young; He had three years of public ministry, if that, was little more than thirty when they led Him out to die! Browning tells us how Dante once sat down to paint a picture, into which he was to put, not the sour anger that is in much of his poems, but all the tenderness and pity of his heart, but had scarcely begun when "certain people of importance" burst in, and

the thing was laid aside and never finished. And this wonderful life was not half lived when persons of importance burst in there also with their bigotry and narrow-mindedness and folly, and it too had to be laid aside. And how much that is irreplaceable the needy world has lost through that!

But Christ Himself had, it seems, no such feeling. "It is finished," He cried on the Cross; was satisfied that He was taking back to God no maimed, thwarted, broken thing, no poor bunch of withered hopes, which is the most that the best of the mass of us can offer Him—some dreams that came to little, some plans that faded out, some small achievements, only colourless shadows of what we had meant to do and be. My dreams, said Christ, have all come true. My plans have been accomplished. My hopes have grown realities. My life lies there all that it was designed to be, "lived out and a grave thoroughly earned," and He dared to look up into God's face and say with confidence, "I have finished the work that Thou gavest Me to do."

That is a bold, a unique claim! And yet is it not literally true? For what were Christ's day-dreams? What did He feel was needed if the world was to be righted? What did He set Himself to do?

To begin with, as He moved about the streets of Nazareth He was shocked that people used their lives so trivially and appeared to be content with that; that they seemed to have never a notion of the wonder of God's gift to them, of the infinitude of opportunity and possibility that lies in it, of the glory that the simplest of us might make of it day by day.

There is a scientist in Balzac who is unmoved by his wife's weeping. Tears, he says cynically, what are tears? I have analysed them. There is some phosphate of lime, some chloride of soda, a little mucus, and some water; that is all. Ah no; not all! But all the sobbing and the aching of this desperate world—what broken hopes, what baffled dreams, what passion of penitence, what hunger of lean hearts—all that is in them for those with the eyes to see. And it amazed

Christ that men and women could take a life, a whole, rich, human life into their hands, and see so little in it, could toss it away, that marvellous thing, for such dusty nothings; could rise yawningly to face another day of boredom; or, worse still, with eagerness, and yet give it to what? To a dull whirl of petty comforts, and foolish pleasures, and silly little selfishnesses—nothing more. And as He watched us all, so bustled and rushed and perspiring about only that, He looked at us sadly, as we do at some glorious creature of the wild born in captivity, content there in its narrow pen so long as it is gorged with fodder, because it has never realized all it might be, all it was meant to be, a thing free as the wind and strong and kingly! If only, thought Christ, I could make them see even a little of what they are missing, that the life they use so stupidly might be a marvellous thing, filled day by day with kindness and unselfishness and chivalry and sacrifice; that they might be like God! "I am come that they might have," not that poor, scummy stagnation which they think is life, but real life, big and clean, with far horizons, and that grows ever more wonderful with every day.

That day-dream has come true. His teaching and His character have been a revelation like the rising of the sun, and huge, undreamed-of possibilities in life lie clear to our astonished eyes. Half the world recognizes frankly that all that went before Him, noble achievements though they were, are mere baby scribblings, that time starts afresh, that life, to be called human life, only begins when we meet Jesus Christ. And you admit that every time you date a letter. And in truth who of us ever comes upon Him in the mass of men without the old gasp of astonishment? This is what has been made of life, out of a life like mine! And there it lies, an example that shames us, making our own days look how shabby and tashed; an inspiration that thrills us, and sets our souls climbing eagerly towards those white heights; a conscience, clear, authoritative, not to be denied, that will

not let us settle down the poor things that we are, not face to face with Christ!

Quiller Couch tells us that, in his young days, there was this queer phenomenon—that every one, writing in Britain, did so with his eyes fastened on a far-off islet in the southern seas, hoping that Stevenson might find his work not quite unworthy. "Surely another age," he says, "will wonder over this curiosity of letters—that for five years the needle of literary endeavour in Great Britain has quivered towards a little island in the South Pacific, as to its magnetic pole." And is it not a marvellous thing that all the ages down we keep our eyes fastened on little Nazareth of the long ago, that our first instinctive question is, What would Jesus think of this? that if we are not sure of anything we lay it alongside of the character of Christ, and if it does not match then we know it is sin. Life has become a vastly bigger, braver, nobler thing, since Jesus showed us how to use it.

Anatole France has some haunting pages in which he describes how the beauties and the glories that there are in life first dawned on him. He was sitting with his fellows one dreary day, with a grey rain falling steadily outside, in the third-rate college where he was brought up, a shabby place, with water oozing from the walls, with greasy tables, and imperfectly washed dishes, and coarse metal mugs, and a sickening smell of lukewarm fried fish everywhere, and life seemed a most dull and vulgar and uninteresting business. And just then the lad who was reading aloud reached the place where Cleopatra went to meet Antony in her golden vessel with its silver oars, and there were beautiful words, the fitting names of lovely things, continually recurring, "flutes" and "naiads" and the like; and suddenly the listener knew that life need not be sordid, might be a long glory. So, when the voice of Christ breaks through to any one, what splendours suddenly spring into being everywhere! And who could hesitate to choose life as He offers it far before anything beside? Riches? Face to face with the possibilities He shows us,

who can care about dross like these? "A great fortune," said Seneca, who had one and knew, "is a great slavery, and not worth one wrinkle on a good man's forehead." Fame? Will you gain more from the world than Bismarck did? Yet towards the end are we not shown him sitting under the shadow of a statue of Victory distributing the wreaths, moodily tossing cones on to a winter fire, and saying, at last breaking a long, gloomy silence, that he had failed; that all that he had done had brought happiness to no one human being; not to himself, not to his family, not to a single soul! Berkeley looks out upon the world of men pushing and jostling for the prizes that they think so valuable. They are mere "thriving earthworms," he declared; fairly long, and pretty fat, for worms; but that is not to live, not the real life of a real man! It is in Jesus Christ we see what life is as it should be lived. And our hearts know now it is so.

And if we turn away from it to something easier and lower, as a lad from some western isle who, given his chance at the university, fritters it away in foolishness till it is gone, back on the barren croft where he must spend his life amid the grey, crawling sea-mists yonder, and with others clammier and colder always curling round his heart, who, every hour of every day, through the long, dull years hears his feet, clattering on the cobbles of the tumbling little steading, as he piles up his muck heaps, echoing mockingly, Fool, Fool! Fool, Fool! so do our own hearts taunt us with our un-Christlikeness as a suicidal thing of shame. If you have heard, and all of us do not (on the Damascus road that day some only saw a blinding light, but heard nothing at all); if you have seen, then be not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Don't barter for a mess of pottage, for the world's poor, tawdry baubles, that with which you can win so much.

"Oh! young mariner,
Down to the haven,
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel,

And crowd your canvas,
And e'er it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it,
Follow the gleam."

If only, dreamed Christ, I could let them see what they might make of life! Well, He has done it. And for us to be satisfied with less is sin.

Further, Christ became ever more and more painfully convinced that men did not know God. They can't, He said, or they could not live as they are doing. Some of them are so anxious and worried, with all God's care and strength and love to lean against! They cannot know of it, and be so fidgety and nervous as they are. Some of them are afraid. Their consciences have drawn so grim a picture of Him that fearfully they shrink out of His presence, wish there were no God! Frightened of God, with His free and full and eager forgiveness, with his incredible generosity, with His compassionate heart that nobody can sour into ill-will, do what he may! And even the best of them are not quite sure. Their faith at most is but a timorous hope, and a trembling perhaps; no more. Often in the Synagogue He had watched them sobbing out their penitential psalms and begging God to turn from anger and be gracious toward them, watched them with wonder. "I was much pleased with your discourse," a wise man once wrote to M'Cheyne, "but it struck me that in your prayers you seemed to think God was unwilling to give." We all do that. And it amazed Christ. Look at His sun, He cries, how it streams down in all its midday fullness on the most unworthy, and at the rain how it falls healingly upon the fields of the least grateful, and how He keeps thrusting His benefits and blessings into the most soiled hands, loading the most impossible people with His kindnesses. If only I could make them see God as He really is; if only they could realize He is their Father; that what their own child is to them, that and far more, each of them is to Him! Can a mother forget her child? No,

you cry, that were unnatural and monstrous; and yet it is conceivable. But that God should forget you is a thing not even thinkable. If only I could let them see Him as He really is! "I am come to reveal the Father."

That day-dream also has come true. For Christ has given us a new God. Partly it was through His teaching—that wonderful teaching about the laddie who went wrong and his reception when at last, ashamed and heart-sick and half-frightened, he turned home; or about the Shepherd guiding those frail, foolish, straying sheep of His, giving them all His skill and care, with His own honour bound up in the gathering of them all into the fold; or about those searching hands feeling for us in the darkness as we lie lost, and the Heart that has missed us! But it is really what Christ was that has convinced us what God too must be. We watch Him spending Himself for others, living through those crowded days, with some other breathless creature always bursting in, urgent that He would come at once and help them too; with people talking excitedly of Him in every street, telling each other gratefully what He has done for them and theirs, or saying confidently to those in any trouble, You should try Jesus of Nazareth; with His name blowing to and fro through the whole country, and everywhere awakening new hope; days with no place for self, given for any one who needed Him; on to that last night when the swaying lanterns moving among the trees warned Him; and, with all that light and noise, there was, it seems, plenty of time for Him to have escaped had He so willed; but He rose calmly from His knees, wakened the drowsy men, and stepped out of the shadows full into the glare, ready and willing to face Calvary; with His life not wrenched out of His hands by force, but given freely; not taken from Him but laid down. And as we read somehow we know that God too lives like that, that His whole being is a like generous unselfishness. It must be so, we say, with our eyes upon Christ. It is so.

Or we are vexed with ourselves for failing Christ so sadly,

feel we should give it up, and not shame Him any longer through our gross disloyalties. And He looks at us with real pain showing in His eyes. "Will you also go away?" He asks. And somehow with that it comes home to us that God finds something lovable in us, that it matters to Him to have us with Him, that His life would be emptier and duller to Him if we were not His.

Or we watch Christ dealing with Peter after the fiasco, with no anger on His face and no reproach in what He says, but looking lovingly into the eyes of the man who had so failed Him, and saying quietly, "I leave my whole cause in your hands without a fear or one misgiving, am entirely sure that I can trust you." And, chokingly, our hearts grow sure God has forgiven us, and believes in us somehow even yet. We stand beside the Cross—Schiller once said a daft thing. He was speaking about Goethe. "I could never love him," he remarked, "for, with all his giving, he never gives himself, he gives like a god." The purblind fool! Stand upon Calvary, and you will learn how God gives, gives His most, His best, His all. Seneca could have taught him that. "The gods are not like men," he said; "we heap up for ourselves; they give and give to others till they leave themselves bare." And at the Cross we know that that is so, that if God can give us anything to help us, it is ours; can do anything on our behalf, then we can count upon it; can bear anything for us, then He will face it gladly. What it may cost Him is nothing to Him; but we must not perish, must be saved; and to achieve that He throws in His all, God's all, unreckoningly.

So it is always. This is the marvellous tribute that we offer Christ; He has become the language in which we must think of God. As Bunsen said to his wife when he lay dying, "In thy face I have seen the face of the Eternal." So we know now that God must have Christ's face, Christ's ever helping hands, Christ's depth and tenderness of sympathy, Christ's heart, Christ's ways. And what a difference that

makes! And, knowing it, we must believe it and trust to it, and go upon our way assuming it is true, that God does surely love us; and that He really has forgiven us; and that we can count upon Him seeing us safely through. So shall Christ know His work is really finished, and not that there is still one nervous, timid, anxious soul that even yet has not taken it in. "For verily," says Juliana of Norwich, "it is the most joy that may be that He that is highest and mightiest, noblest and worthiest, is lowest and meekest, homeliest and most courteous, and truly and verily this marvellous joy shall be shown us all when we see Him." But she adds there is no need for waiting until then; for every one with eyes has but to look at Christ to be sure, here and now, that so it is.

Still further, Christ saw we had failed, that life had proved too difficult for us, that evil had mastered us, that we had lost heart, and thrown away our arms and made a pitiful surrender. It hurt Him to see us, made for a free, clean, rich, life, so bullied by hectoring sins, so shamed by masterful temptations. And He longed to make us know from our own glad experience that there is no need for so much as one of us to drift on in this cowed and hopeless way. "I am come," He said, sharing with us perhaps the dearest of His dreams, "to call sinners to repentance," to rouse dull apathetic broken souls to try again, to let them see they can break every fetter, and can snap every habit, and can burst every shackle; yes, though it has sunk deep into their very flesh; that they can recover themselves out of the snare where they lie so securely trapped; that, with the madness passing from their minds, they can come to themselves, to the real self God meant that they should be; that a new power can enter into them, whereby, like the man stretching out his useless hand and finding it made whole as the other —how, he did not know—the part of them, whatever it may be, that lies withered and dead can come to life and function —the heart, hard as a stone whatever God may do, unmoved

even on Calvary, feeling it all at last; and the will, really willing what it won't will, though God knows we have often tried to force the rusty wheels to turn; and the poor sin-sick soul rising above itself, shaking off its infirmities, gaining the very victory that had been always hopeless. If I can only make them see it is still possible, even yet, says Christ, it can be done.

The Gnostics had a lovely legend in which they pictured the earth maiden (shall we paraphrase that as the human soul?) as Helen of Troy, beautiful, peerless Helen. But madness came upon her; she forgot her past, and who she was, and all that she had been, sank lower and yet lower, till she who had been Helen, who was Helen still, was a slave in Tyre, a thing of shame blowing about the streets of that vile seaport, wonderful Helen come to that! And there Simon found her, recognized her though so changed and shamed, dealt lovingly and tenderly with her. And slowly, slowly the poor darkened brain began to clear, and the cloud lifted from her memory, and into her wonderful eyes there stole back sanity, womanhood, remembrance, and she looked round her at that scene of horror with a shudder of loathing, was redeemed, and saved, and made her own beautiful peerless self again. If only you will credit it, says Christ, whatever you have done, whatever you may be, I can do that for every one of you. And the New Testament is one long witness that that dream of His that seems too splendid for reality is no dream, but is true; that the most settled character can be pulled down to its foundations and built up on a new plan, that the most truculent sins can be defied and mastered, that the most hopeless rout can be changed into glorious victory. They call Him many names, but their favourite for Him is Saviour. He burst my bonds, and I am free. He touched me, and my soul was healed from its chronic diseases. He spoke, and sins that raged in me like very devils, and which I could never master, were cast out. Of that they are all sure; however else they differ, upon that

they are unanimous. Listen, they say, and blown back to us comes that shout of a great multitude no man can number, giving thanks and praise. And why? "Unto Him that loved us, and loosed us from our sins in His own blood." Christ gave them victory when they were down—that's why!

That is the whole point of the Testament. The very reason of its being is that these happily excited people are entirely certain they have come on that for which always and everywhere earnest spirits have been seeking; and that they feel that they can't keep so huge a discovery to themselves, must ring it out over the world. And what is it that they have found? Nothing less than this, that there is no reason any longer why any one should live unworthily; no need for the poorest bungler of us to be soiled and shabby any more. They are so sure of that that they declare with emphasis that if any one drags along lamely in the old feckless, sinful way it is not now because he can't do better, but simply because, when the pinch comes, he won't. All the ages down people with any soul in them have been dissatisfied and angry with themselves, have felt miserably that life as they were living it was not life as it ought to be, and have sought everywhere for some remedy, for something that would lift them up nearer to what they knew that they should be, have tried this, have turned to that, breaking into an eager little run as each new hope loomed up before them, always pathetically sure that this time they were hot upon the scent. And not too much has come of it. But these men in the Testament are certain that the long quest is over, and that the goal is won. In Jesus Christ, they say, the baffling problem has been solved at last, and the most blundering soul among us finds in Him everything it can want. There is nothing thinkable, they claim, nothing that might conceivably help us, that is not to be had in Him amply and for the taking. And if only we will accept and use what is offered us in Him, no one among us but can stand fast where he has always

fallen ; and where he has been chronically weak, can grow strong with a valour that can front impossibilities and see them through, can do all things, yes even that, and that, and that ! There where for you the danger lies, Christ is enough for you ; and there He guarantees that He will see you through. Here to-day Christ looks at us, so hopeless and abject and cowed and basely content. If only, He says, I could make them see it, there is not one of them all who needs to go his way just what he came, like that poor creature at Bethesda, crawling back to his mat again after his daily failure ; not one soul here but might become quite different, might really find the biggest of the promises working out in it, might have experience of this gospel, not as a moving rumour merely, but as the most certain and most solid fact of its own life. And, with that He pauses, and looks straight at you. "I can do it," He says, "I have proved that I can do it, yes, even for you ! "

VIII

HOW CHRIST WON THROUGH: A STUDY OF FAITH IN ACTION

JOHN xii. 20–32.

WHAT lay behind this request for an interview we are not told; but the emotion it awakened in Christ's mind makes it quite clear that it was much more than mere idle curiosity. Apparently, these were big, wistful, hungry souls, who had found little to satisfy them in the faith of their boyhood, and had turned towards Judaism—they had come up to worship, so we read. But that, too, seemed failing them. And something they had seen in Jesus Christ, some word of His that had carried to them on the outskirts of the press, had stormed their very hearts. Was not this, they felt, that for which they had been seeking so long, really found at last! And, being Greeks, instinctively they turned to one with a Greek name. Can you arrange things for us, sir? they asked. "We would see Jesus."

And is not that the reason why some of us, at least, are here to-day? Are not we, too, trying to push our way through the jostle and crowd and surge of things to Him? For we know that beside Him much that puzzles and confuses us elsewhere grows greatly clearer; that, with His eyes upon us, somehow we are bigger and better than our natural selves; that in His presence God, who in other places seems so dim and shadowy and far away, and whom our childish minds forget so easily, becomes how strangely real, how gloriously near; that Christ's calm makes our own hot,

fretted, peevish hearts grow cooler, braver, steadier; that His strength helps us also to be strong. We would see Jesus.

And, be sure, He is not far from any one of us, the same wonderful Christ as long ago, and He is really here! If, for you, the service dribbles on tamely and prosaically, with never a thrill nor lift in it, push your way to Him for yourself. Cry to Him, keep crying, like that blind man outside Jericho that ordinary day like any other when he had tapped his hesitating way as usual to the accustomed begging-place, and was sitting yonder in the shadow, waiting for the long, slow hours to crawl away, till they would come to lead him home again. And suddenly round and about him there was the sound of feet, of many feet; and eager folk kept thrusting past him, crowds of them; and it was told him that the new Prophet, whose name was in everybody's mouth, was there; and with that all the tales that he had heard of Him kept tumbling back into his mind—the lepers were being cleansed, so the people said with confidence, and the deaf heard, and the blind—ah, but that was impossible, of course, was too good to be true! Yet, who could tell? And with that he was on his feet, crying and struggling to get at Him, struggling desperately, madly, yet in vain; for they stood close and thrust him back, those callous folk who had no need of Christ like his; was crying and crying with a piteous, eager voice, though they turned on him angrily. "Hush," they said, with their hands up to their strained ears, "Be quiet; for you can't get through to Him; and we can't hear one word that He is saying with that stupid noise of yours." But he would not be silenced. This was his one chance. Keep you, too, crying! For as over all the scluffing of so many feet, through all the hum and babble of that excited crowd, something of it carried to Christ, so, now too, He will stand still, and look in your direction, asking, "What is that? Bring him to Me." And, in a little, you and He will be standing together face to face; you and He all alone, as if there were nobody else in all the world just you, just

He, you with your wants, and He with His sufficiency; you with your silly, blundering, sinful soul, and He your Saviour! We would see Jesus—is that not why we are here?—must see Him, because no one else will do.

But what arrests one in this passage is the emotion that was awakened in Christ's mind, the wave upon wave of feeling that went surging through His very soul. Evidently He felt that this was one of the great crises of His life. Yet to you and me it looks a commonplace event, an everyday occurrence, a trifle of small moment. Never an hour but some desperate folk were bursting in on Him, with a hot clamour that He should do this and that for them. And yet, when it was told Him, there in the street, that a few Greeks would like to talk with Him, a marvellous vision instantly rose up before His eyes. He saw, it seems, all the dim, uncountable masses of the Gentile peoples, every individual of them with a sensitive human heart that can be hurt, with a frail, stumbling, delicate soul, making their way, as best they might, through all the difficulties of this dangerous world. And were they turning to look to Him for guidance? Were these few men the first trickle of a huge inrushing tide, with the whole sea behind it? Had He been called of God to help and save all these? And with that, already He could see the whole world yellow to the harvest, and could hear the sound of hurrying multitudes all down the centuries, finding their way towards Him.

That is the difference faith makes—the richness, and the constant excitement, and the glory that it gives to life. You and I drift on through the years dully enough, because we do not believe in God, not really; and so we have no expectation. But Jesus did believe in Him, was sure He is alive and abroad in the world; that, therefore, anything may happen any hour. And thus to Him any smallest incident was a magic casement opening upon who could tell what possibilities! A fisherman offers Him a crude inchoate half-faith, and with that He is sure that He can found a world-wide Church that

will defy the powers of evil, ay, and grind them into nothingness at last: a dying brigand, paying the just penalties of his crimes, gropes towards Him in the darkness with the vague hands of a blind man; and, founding upon that, Christ dies, quite sure that He has won: two or three Gentiles seek an interview with Him, and He sees a whole teeming world of men and women being saved.

And they came true, these dreams. Yes, even this impossible one that rose before Him in the streets that day, with the thronging people pushing past Him. Only a few years, and in the Revelation John can picture the Christian heavens as a vast city, with gates facing north and south and east and west, open by night and day. For always there is flocking into it a multitude no man can number, of every kindred and people and nation and tongue. A few years more, and a church Father cries exultantly that, like the ripples when a stone is cast into a pool, so is the faith eddying out and out, out to the very limits of the world. "Why," he cries, "even in Britain they have heard of it, and are believing!" Yes, even in Britain we too turn to Jesus Christ as our one hope. The audacious, insane-looking dream came true.

And He saw other visions and dreamed other dreams, that wonderful Dreamer. Once on a day He came on you, and, as you passed, He looked at you, and paused, and looked again, with that light on His face, that eagerness in His eyes, that were there when He chanced on Matthew or Zacchæus, came to you, and laid His hand on you, and, "I can make you like Myself," He said, "can give to you My heart, My mind, My ways, can fashion these out of that soiled and twisted character of yours. I promise it," He said. And what if that dream also some day should come true! Ah! is it not worth striving, praying, hoping for, and that for a whole lifetime, if there be any chance at all that, in the end, that also may come really true!

But, to return to Christ's emotion, Charles Reade points

out in one place that it is given us to see the heroes of the world only after their minds have been made up, and they are moving resolutely forward with firm steps, and not when their uncertain hearts are hesitatingly feeling their unsure way to a decision, adding as his opinion that, were that latter visible to us, they would not seem nearly so heroic. I am not sure of that. Nothing even in the Gospels helps me more than passages such as this in which it is vividly brought home to us that our Lord's triumph was not an instinct, but a virtue ; that faith was not automatic to Him, but that every time He also had to think out what God's will for Him was, had sometimes to feel for His Father's hand to help and guide and steady Him in a gross darkness in which He Himself could not see at all ; that it was our very fight He had to fight, and that our very weapons were His only weapons ; that He did all He did, was all He was, just through a valiant heart, and a brave trust in God, and a bold faith that followed unafraid even where He could not understand at all, and the way looked clean lost, seemed to have died out among wild bogs and boulders. Of all which this here is a notable example.

Our Lord had known when He set out for Jerusalem that it meant doom. And the disciples felt that too. "Let us also go that we may die with him," said Thomas ; and one loves him for that. On their arrival, indeed, there had been a roar of noisy welcome in the streets. But Christ was not deceived by that. The dry grass had caught fire, and for a little it was blazing merrily, but in a moment or two it would certainly go out, and there be only blackness. The end, He felt, was certain. And His mind was disquieted, was, for once, so He says, torn this way and that. Ought He to die, and to die now ? He was not sure, and He felt that He must be sure. Oh yes, be sure ! Be sure ! For the salvation of a whole world hangs on Thee, and we have no other hope ! If this fail, all is lost ! Ought He to die, just there, just then, without one soul that as yet really understood ; with

nothing, as it seemed, accomplished, with the work surely not even begun? Was it God's will for Him, could it be, that He should throw away His life before the truths for which He stood had germinated in some hearts at least—even a few, yes, even one—where they could grow and sow themselves, and be broadcast by every wind over the the world? Ought He? What shall I pray? Shall it be "Father, save Me from this hour"? Yet is it not that Father who has led Me to this hour? Have I not put myself completely in His hands; have I not looked to Him for guidance step by step, and He has brought Me here; not, surely, that I should shirk this, but because in some way the right road to be followed runs through this dark desolate valley, where the winds scream so eerily, and where it seems to end in a dead wall of mountainous rock that nobody can scale? He led Me here; and where He leads I follow blindly, making no conditions, holding nothing back. "Father, glorify Thy name; and, for the rest, do with Me what Thou wilt. Here am I, a glad eager oblation offered with all My heart."

You too, perhaps, have come to a bare wind-swept spot in life, and difficulties crowd in upon you from all sides; you, too, stand like that man in Bunyan swithering, uncertain, "looking this way and that," not sure there in the dark what you should do, why God has brought you there, what it all means. The waters ahead look so swollen and so rushing, can you be really meant to wade through that? The road has grown so lonely and so steep, can this be really the right path? And what are you doing about it all? Are you bursting in to God with a hot indignant heart, and a babble of clamorous protest, telling Him that the thing is ridiculous and just won't do, or with a whimper that whines and snivels that it isn't fair? Or are you learning something of the Master's quiet, and the Master's valorous spirit, and the Master's hardihood of faith? Out at the front when death was very near, so near that its cold breath blew across the heart and set it shuddering, it was not when one was at

his biggest that that heart kept praying, "Save me." No, in one's higher moments one kept asking only courage, courage, grant me that, dear God, lest the craven part of me master the better me; help me to see this through with honour; courage! courage! and for the rest, "Thy will be done." "Yes," says old Bishop Wilson, "even though that be through my own undoing." Well, what of you and me? Are we growing less fretful, less opinionative in the planning of our lives, more biddable and like the child Christ wishes us to be, that trusts implicitly, and follows without fear? Are we learning that our own foolish hearts are not dependable, and that God is: that our insistent petitions for what we felt that we must have were often utter folly, mercifully and wisely refused? Are we winning as our settled mood this mind of Jesus Christ that can trust God even when all is very black and not a star is showing? Not otherwise can we gain peace of soul and quietness of spirit. For be sure we shall not get from life all that we wish from it; be sure that clouds and darkness will make some days, some long seasons, chill and shivery; be sure we too will have to face things grim to bear and hard to understand. And unless we know God well enough to trust Him utterly, there will often be fever, and fretting, and a moan and heaving of unrest, in our poor, frightened, flustered hearts.

Once on a day in France the bonniest of experiences befell me. I suppose that in the Middle Ages they would certainly have said that I saw Jesus Christ with my own very eyes. And perhaps I did. We had been weeks in that appalling desolation up towards Paschendaele, where there was never a blade of grass, nor any tree, only that empty, waesome land churned into miles and miles of shell-holes, till it looked like some wild tumbling sea. And at long last we had gone back to rest. And it seemed heaven. For there were budding hedgerows, and a glimmer of green on living trees, and grass and flowers, glorious flowers in the first splendour of the spring. And one's dry soul lay greedily

soaking in the sheer beauty of it all. And the next day news came that we were needed back in the old place of horror, to be thrown into a losing battle. It reached us on a perfect afternoon of sunshine ; and, with a heart grown hot and hard, I had turned down a lovely little lane, with a brown burn wimpling beside it, and a lush meadow, all brave sheets of golden and of purple flowers, on either side. The earth was very beautiful ; and life seemed very sweet ; and it was hard to go back into the old purgatory and face death again. And with that, through a gap in a hedge there came a shepherd laddie tending his flock of some two dozen sheep. He was not driving them in our rough way with barking dogs. But he went first, and they were following him ; and if one loitered, he called it by name, and it came running to him. So they moved on, down the lane, and up a little hill, up to the brow, and over it, and so out of my life. And I stood staring after them, hearing as if the words were spoken out aloud to me first and me only, " And when He putteth forth his sheep, He goeth before them," turned, and went down the lane to face what was to be with a heart quieted and stilled. Has not God led Me here, said Christ : has not He brought Me to this hour ? And He is a good Shepherd, wise and kind, and very tender, who makes no mistakes. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for He is with Me ; His rod and His staff, they comfort Me. And with that He turned towards Calvary, unafraid, contented, grateful. If only you and I could learn to put ourselves so unreservedly into God's hands —look how it worked in Jesus Christ !

" I feel," wrote Keats, looking across at the hills of Scotland, and preparing, he with his frail body, to set out on his tramp of some five hundred miles, " I feel as if I were going to a tournament." And Jesus faced the Cross as if it were a tournament, rode into the lists, this glorious Knight of God, with His head up, and steady eyes, and an undaunted heart, and rang His lance in confident challenge against all

the shields of all the powers of evil, certain He could overthrow them. What an amazing faith! It seemed so sordid and so mean an end that His brave dreams should fizzle out in that squalid wayside scene, there on the place of execution, naked, helpless, despised, with that exultant group guffawing up into His face, with not one voice raised for Him, with the city unconcernedly going about its own affairs, with busy people bustling by upon the road and hardly bothering to turn their heads, for somebody was always being crucified, and it was no affair of theirs. The authorities were there to see about these things, and doubtless they were right. A pitiful last chapter surely! And yet Christ faced it, not simply undismayed, but with a shout of victory. "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Me." Since God Himself is leading Me here, it is not for nothing. Here, where He leads Me, I can serve Him best. My life may have left people unimpressed; My teaching may have passed them by; My kindness may have been forgotten; well then, it must be through My death it is to come. And, knowing that, I am content to die. I have tried everything but die for them; and that too I do gladly. And this will not fail. For I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will win men's hearts.

You notice, then, it was two things that brought Christ through—two things, not one. And if the first of them was His huge trust in God, the other was His utter faith in man, in you, in me. I know men, so He said, know they are big and chivalrous, that this will lay compulsion on them, that if they see Me dying for them, they will not be able to resist Me, but will have to give their hearts to Me, will not be able to keep them away. I know it, He said confidently, and died in that happy faith, quite sure of victory, because so sure of us. And has He overestimated us? Are we meaner than He thought? What about you? Does this thing lay compulsion on you, force you to be Christ's? What would you

say to testing it ? It is not far, only a very little way out of the stir of ordinary life ; only a step or two up this small hill ; here is the place. How is it with you now ? Out in the world I know we can, and do, forget about it all. But here, beside the Cross, with Christ's face looking down at you, do you not feel that pull, that drawing, that compulsion ? Stand here, and think it out, and judge yourself, for so Christ bids. You are not normal if you can turn upon your heel and go your way, unmoved. Yet can you, do you ? " Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by," nothing at all ? Oh ! elsewhere it will fade again, and our rushed minds will fill with other things, I know. But here ? Cannot you go the length of that most moving line in Shakespeare in which Othello in his agony looks after Desdemona, and cries from his torn, foolish, distracted, maddened, breaking heart, " Yet I do love thee, and when I love thee not, chaos comes back again." Cannot you go that length towards Christ ; cannot you say to Him that, though you know you will forget Him, hurt Him, disappoint Him, break His heart, yet you do love Him, and when you love Him not, chaos comes back again ; and life loses its meaning and its splendour, and sinks back into a stupid business, a dull meaningless affair, petty and boring and small. Test yourself. Can you ? Do you ?

Then, that is well. Only our Lord expects more from us than a mere gush of cheap emotion. I, He says, am not doing anything unique, save in degree. This is the universal law of worthy living—that if you use life merely on yourself, to further your own foolish ends and personal interests and private comforts, then you are wasting it in a hideous prodigality ; and only if you squander it for God and others, throw it away in some generous cause, live it out after Christ's own plan, can you have any idea of how rich and glorious a thing it can become. " If any man will serve Me, let him follow Me," says Christ, and sets His face towards Calvary, fully expecting we will follow there, never dreaming we shall

hesitate. How splendid is His faith in us; and how His trust ennobles us! It can't be easy, He admits: it must mean pulling hard against the current, and a long steep climb. But there are two things, He declares, that I can promise you with certainty. And the first of the two is this, that if a man serve Me, him will My Father honour. Only, by that He does not mean what lesser spirits mean. In the Old Testament, for instance, most even of the saints take it for granted that you can judge of a man's spiritual standing by the state of his bank book; and can safely assume that the good man will be rich, and that the rich man must be good; must be, they felt, for God is over all, and will, no doubt, shelter and shield and heap His benefits upon his own, and put to shame those who resist Him. As an exultant Psalmist sums it up, "Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known My name." Yes, agrees the New Testament, and leads us again to that little slope, and climbs it, and stands there with awed heart in the darkness, and looking up says solemnly, Because He hath set His love on Me and known My name, I have set Him on high.

The honour that God offers us is this—that He will condescend to use us, lean upon us, call for our poor help, give us a real share in His own agony and saving of the sinful world. And Christ expects that that will not scare us away, but thrill us, win us, lay compulsion on us, draw us irresistibly. Such faith has He in you and me.

And this too I can promise, so He adds, that if My servant follow where I am, then he will never be alone. Always I shall be there, and never will I ask of him what I Myself have not given; and never will he be where My own footsteps, there before him, do not mark the way for him; and always he can count upon My presence and My ready help. Always it will be Christ and you together, so it seems. But, when you think it out, is not that heaven? They are with Christ, we say of the redeemed, which is far better. But you, too,

are to be with Christ, if you are faithful; always to be with Christ. For where I am, there shall My servant be; in heaven, it seems, even here. For what is heaven, how do you think of it? As a snug spot where, this unpleasant tax of self-denial that is demanded of us safely paid and done with, we can loll at our lazy ease, and have a good time, doing as we choose at last? Ah, no! For heaven means service, means self-sacrifice, is just a settled habit of Christ-likeness, and living life after God's plan, the God who never thinks about Himself at all, but gives and gives and gives till there is nothing that He has not given. Are you quite certain that you would like heaven, absolutely sure that you would not feel cosier and more at home in that comfortable selfishness that we call hell? Dare you, as you peer in at it, take heaven? Would you like it? Will you have it? Dare you? "If not, remain without, among the cattle of the field."

Yes, let us test ourselves by Christ's own test for us, here, upon Calvary, face to face with the hardships He offers us. How then is it with you? Out in the world the madness may return to us, and our poor foolish heart may stray once more. But here where we are sane, here where the cloud has lifted from us, here where we have come to ourselves again, what do you say? Do not your arms leap out for Him, and is not your heart drawn to Him? Stammering, stuttering, confused, with little or no evidence to prove your case, cannot you too cry stubbornly, "Yet I do love Thee, and when I love Thee not, chaos comes back again." And it is Thou, Thou, Thou I choose.

IX

WHAT BROUGHT CHRIST TO THE CROSS

"Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory."—1 Cor. ii. 8.

WHATEVER else is to be made of it, every one feels that the Cross stands out a hideous tragedy, a dreadful fact black as a splash of ink upon our human records. "They have crucified the Lord of Glory!" gasps Paul in horror. And as often as it comes in sight of Calvary, the heart of mankind echoes that shuddering cry, stands rooted to the spot, staring incredulously at what can't be true; yet there it really is!

How did it happen, this appalling thing? What sudden orgy of insanity overwhelmed for one mad day the kindly human nature that we know so well, and swept it headlong into this? For we feel hotly that it must have been something monstrous, inexplicable, blown in from the darkness round us, that was guilty of that horror. Yet the last haunting terror of it is that it was brought about by ordinary mortals like ourselves, kindly and likeable in many ways, no doubt—their children ran with happy shouts to father that day he came home from Calvary, well satisfied, as he kept telling his wife as he played with his little one, with the day's admirable work—that it was not something unthinkable and gross and obviously devilish that was responsible for our Lord's cross; but that it was set up by the quite ordinary, decent and respectable little sins of decent and respectable people, by the kind of thing into which we are all apt to drift

every other day. Let us remember that with a great shivering awe, lest in our lives too there rings out that sound of hammering, as the nails run home.

"The past throws light on the future," says Guicciardini, "because the world was ever of the same make; and all that is or will be in another day has already been, and the same things return, only with different names and colours. It is not every one who knows them under the new face, but the wise know them." And age by age the Lord Christ is crucified. And we too have crowded eagerly to Calvary and nailed Him to His cross, and laughed up into His face, and watched Him die, and gone our way well pleased and much relieved that we have hustled Him out of the way—yes, even we.

Who brought this infamy about, who did it? Well, to begin with then, there were the Pharisees. As a class they disliked Christ, and they said so frankly. They resented the intrusion of this layman, and an ill-educated man at that, they snarled, into their own domain: His teaching, or much of it, seemed to them sheer blasphemy: His habits they thought just disgusting. You can always tell a man by the kind of company he keeps, they sneered, and, with a meaning shrug of the shoulders, glanced scornfully at the sorry rabble of impossible persons with whom Christ was not ashamed to mingle. Yet they were zealously religious people, keen church-going folk as we would say, more keen and zealous by far than we are. They prayed, they fasted, they disciplined themselves with a thoroughness along their own lines that might well make us with our cheap amateur haphazard methods much ashamed; they were good people in their way, devout and desperately in earnest so far as they saw. But they made two mistakes, were apt, as Jesus told them bluntly, to keep their life and their religion in separate compartments, and to try to compound for the one by offering that other. To pray and fast and keep their multitudinous rules was hard enough, but after all a good deal easier than

to be kind and unselfish when that clashed with their desires, and they hoped and felt that it might do instead. They prayed long and ardently, but it had small effect upon their characters. Their temper, prayers or no prayers, remained still uncurbed, the fierceness of their animosities and party spirit hardly checked. Nor did that seem to vex them, or to make them feel that something was wrong somewhere. That that was the end of religion had not somehow struck them. And so, while praying hard, and thronging to the Temple day by day, they planned Calvary, and worked it out triumphantly into a fact of history.

In which there is at once a very solemn warning for us all. For Jesus tells us very gravely that His experience of men has taught Him that this, or something like this, is a very common failing; that people can be eagerly, even fussily religious, and yet that nothing may come of it in their characters. And He keeps begging each of us to make quite certain that it is not so in his case, pursues us in this matter with blunt, awkward, pertinacious questions, difficult to face. These prayers of yours, He asks, what are they doing in you? Do they end with themselves? Are they really making you more like God; or do you run them up as a cheap substitute for worthy living? Your knowledge of the Father, and of the brotherhood of man, is the one forcing you to live your life too in God's way; and is the other making your conscience more acute to things about you which formerly you didn't notice, so that you can't pass by now upon the other side, happy in your own comforts, until these wrongs are righted. The thrills in a service when our souls are moved may become only a kind of luxury, and even an intemperance; and it has no religious value unless that emotion ends in definite action. "I fell in," says Bunyan, "with the customs of the time, to wit, to go to church twice a day, and there would I sing and pray with the foremost, yet retaining my evil life." What if we, too, are like that merchant whose bales, won at the price of such far travelling

and sacrifice, on being opened, fell into mere dust? Hot, perspiring, diligent, that man, says Christ, is simply losing all his labour and creating bitter disappointment and sheer ruin for himself, for he is building upon sand, and the first gush of temper, the first claim of selfishness, the first evil day, will sweep away all his so-called religion, mere planks and wreckage tossing for a second on wild waters, and then gone.

But, though it seems much the less of the two, it was their other error that proved far the more tragic. These Pharisees had minds that were old-fashioned, narrow, bigoted. They stood for the old ways and the accepted forms of things. They themselves would have said that they were men of principle, and not to be cajoled aside. But in reality they were simply inhospitable to new light, frankly incredulous that there was any more to find. To them change meant, of necessity, degeneracy. Their particular form of stating truth was final. To their fathers there had been vouchsafed amazing spiritual experiences; and they, the children, not only remembered them with gratitude, and founded on them, as was right and fitting, but took it for granted that the way in which God acted then must be the way in which He would act now, if He did so at all; forgot, indeed, God was alive in their day too, that even the best in history did not exhaust Him, that there was "still much light to break forth from His word." To them the book was closed, the revelation and their understanding of it were alike, they felt, completed. They had no hope of progress—no expectation of any further news bursting in to us from God; and when rumours of that reached them, at once and without examination, they discredited them as impossible and, on the face of things, quite evidently unauthentic. For, in effect, boldly they laid it down that their poor passing conceptions were a perfect reflection of God's thoughts, their theories, not simply theories, but the eternal statement of eternal facts, which could not be improved, and which must not be altered. Moses

said this! Moses did that! they said; and for them that was final. And when Jesus stood forth, and said, No doubt he did; but I now tell you something wholly different and vastly better, they clapped quick horrified hands over their outraged ears and would not listen, resolved at once that this appalling person must be hustled out of the way. For if these notions of His spread abroad, why, plainly, there is an end of religion! And it was that that set up the cross on Calvary!

That thoughtful but forgotten author, Arthur Helps, remarks with truth that, "To be tolerant of intolerant people, to see how natural their intolerance is, and, in fact, thoroughly to comprehend it and feel it, is the last stage of tolerance, which few men, I suppose, in the world attain." Faced by that drastic test, once again Christ stands forth supreme. It was with compassion that He looked at these dull, angry souls shut into their cramped corner of a world, mistaking their dim, smoky rushlights for God's sun. The prophets grow quite fierce over that habit of the human mind, either to look back wistfully to the great days of long ago when God really was God, and things really happened, whereas now our lot is cast in a flat and prosaic time, or else to assume that what they have is all that they can have. Don't keep talking of Egypt, they fairly shout, almost shaking them. For if you, too, have only a touch of the faith they had then, now in our day things far more wonderful will happen in your own experience! Don't rest content with such glimpses of truth as you have caught. Look here, and here, and here, at all the glories in it hidden from you still. And they are hot and angry. But Christ, remembering how natural it is, is very gentle. No one, He says, prefers new wine to old; and to be satisfied with the accustomed, the familiar, that in which one was brought up, is all but universal; did not think it strange that many did not take to Him at once, and was content to wait for their slow stumbling minds. None the less, again and again He urges on us to see to it carefully that we keep our minds open, and our hearts

expectant, on the outlook for God ; holding that not to do so is a moral failure that may have tragic consequences. And with fearsome reason. For when you come to look at things, it was no hideous and ugly sin, but just a prejudice, a narrowness of mind, a lack of mental hospitality, just an unwillingness to credit or even consider what was new and unaccustomed, just a dislike of being jostled out of one's settled lines of thought, just that, that set up Christ's cross upon Calvary ! And when to-day one hears some, passionate in their dislike of any innovation in theology or in religious thinking, proudly declaring it is loyalty to Christ that makes them take their stand, the fact stares at us that it was such people, animated in their day by just such motives, quite sure, they too, that they were right and working for God's honour, who crucified our Lord ; and every age since then they have continued doing it. It was when Mansoul fell that old crabbed Mr. Prejudice, with sixty deaf men under him, was set to guard Eargate. And it was that sinister guard that was the crucifixion squad that day Christ died, their hands that pushed Him forward, that laid Him on the cross, that ran the spear into His side—" old, angry, ill-conditioned Prejudice," and his deaf ears and his inhospitable heart.

Are our hands clean ? It is so easy to lose the gallant spirit of adventure that follows truth unflinchingly wherever truth may lead, to settle down and go no farther, to imagine that our poor little bundle contains everything that is of value, and to refuse to undo it again to pack in the new finds, to grow tired of always realizing that our thoughts of Christ are utterly inadequate, and so once more the walls, beginning to rise, have to come down and we must start rebuilding on a wider plan.

" God offers to every mind its choice between Truth and Repose," said Emerson. " Take which you please. You can never have both." We choose repose and let truth go. And yet in the New Testament, however high they pitched

their thoughts of Christ, they found these couldn't anything like meet the facts that came crowding in upon them from their own experience, that they must make their thinking of Him vastly ampler still, and they kept doing it joyously. And, indeed, it is a poor tribute to Christ to say that we have come to the end of Him, know everything in Him there is to know; that the men of Nicea or Westminster, or even Paul, saw out to the end of the universe, and that there are no other stars, no further constellations to be found and charted. Always when we cease growing, we have started to decay. When water is not running, it is getting sour and stale and just a trifle smelly.

"Thought's a strange land—
Some dig its fields with diligence,
Some pass through it steadfastly, like pilgrims to the Sepulchre.
Some haste in dust and heat—toward what goal?
Some climb its difficult hills, and clouds receive them from our sight,
Some take a neat villa, and plant geraniums in their borders,
And test the drains, and trim the wandering roses,
And set up a paling to hide the restless road,"

says Miss Underhill. Most of us do that last. For we are tired of footing it. We hide the restless road and settle down in some snug corner that we think will do. But she, for one, is all for pushing on and on, until the marshes and the salt winds and the strange voyaging birds make clear that we are near the sea.

"There on the fringes of thought when night is falling,
I'll wait the invading tide."

Give Christ a mind like that and He will lead you ever deeper. Yes, but do we give it Him? Are you never afraid that had you lived in His day you also, to a certainty, would have been hot against Him? Suppose it had been in our time a young man suddenly emerged out of an obscure Highland village, a tradesman in a little country way, who had never been much out of His own valley, and, talking in that provincial accent of His, told us that our accredited

teachers were in many ways all wrong and our religion largely obsolete, that He had come to show us a more excellent way, a far truer faith, would we listen to Him any more than they did then? Do we listen when He does send His messengers to us with some new light? "Christ," said Tertullian, "did not call Himself the custom, but the truth." And while we are all loyal worshippers of custom, truth has few real disciples. Always it has had to fight its way to victory through hostile minds, distrustful and suspicious. Are you never afraid, I say, that at the last He may answer and say, In what way are you different from My murderers long ago? I am the Truth; and you, too, have denied Me entrance, would have none of Me, tried, as they did, to throttle Me! It was not something monstrous, it was sins like yours that long ago did Me to death. Aye, and yours, too, have often hindered Me.

"I observe," wrote Jonathan Edwards in his Diary, "that old men seldom have any advantage of new discoveries, because these discoveries are beside a way of thinking they have long been used to. Resolved, therefore, that if ever I live to years I will be impartial to hear the reason of all pretended discoveries, and receive them, if rational, how long soever I have been used to another way of thinking." Such an entry in the Diary of Caiaphas or Annas, lived out, would have saved us the Cross. Glancing up awestruck at what sins like ours can do, let us, too, pledge ourselves to that, praying God for the open mind that recognizes Jesus when He comes.

And then there were the Sadducees. They held all the high places in the Church, yet they had lost all spirituality, and indeed all belief in it. Religion was all very well, they said, but really, to get things done, you must look, not in that direction, but to politics. The axioms on which pious people founded were all more than doubtful, utterly unprovable, and almost certainly untrue. There was no resurrection—that, at least, was certain—no rewards and punishments here-

after; this brief life of ours was really all. A soul? Oh yes, no doubt there was a soul. But what was wanted was not brooding over that. Give us plain practical measures of reform for this life here, and, not a doubt of it, the soul will take care of itself. And this upsetting person was becoming troublesome with His insistence upon secondary things, so they conceived them, was breeding trouble where they wanted peace and quiet. Yes, they felt, He were better away; and in the Council they, too, voted death.

And isn't all that very typical of our own day? If you wanted a label for us, would you find a better than a Sadducean Age? We also are not worrying about immortality, hardly believe in it, or at least are not sure; we, too, have limited ourselves to this dust-speck of time, leaving unclaimed the vast inheritance beyond of which Christ told us; we, too, are putting all our zeal and passion and enthusiasm into things of this earth here, ay, and material things at that, quite certain that that is the only road to progress, and that this everlasting chatter about the soul is quite beside the point. And they are all so earnest, and so certain, work so hard, are animated often by such lofty motives, are so sure that there is really no manner of need for Christ; that given this, and this, and this, each of them pushing forward his particular panacea, the world will manage very well; that to talk about Christ, and changing people's hearts, and making us new creatures is merely to lose precious time and wander from the practical into vague day-dreaming of which nothing comes. And year by year their voices grow a little harder, and they eye Christ more and more askance, feel sourly that He is a bit of a nuisance and a stumbling-block to progress, keeping people quiet who should not be quiet, lulling them with these dim immaterial, fantastic, spiritual hopes of His which they think have no body, and can't have. Once more the whisper grows, "Were He not far better away?" Meantime we can ignore Him, they say; and they do. How many do!

To-day, too, there is a great shouting for Barabbas, for

the man of action : we, too, believe in politics and economics, but religion ? Oh ! no doubt there is a soul ! But, set their circumstances right, and men will need no Saviour, will soon show that they can take care of themselves ! If, said Christ once, if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness ! If the enthusiasms and nobilities of an age, the cures and remedies for which it works with such eager self-sacrifice, are shallow, superficial, touching none of the real roots of the disease, what then ? And still Christ holds to it, as He did in His own day full as ours is now of social sores and of tremendous economic problems, that in the last resort nothing can save the world but a new race of men and women, with new aims and ends and likings, and a new unselfishness and ardour of self-sacrifice. And still that angers men, and they rise up and cast Him out. We are all members of the council before which He is tried. And how does your heart vote ? This is a Sadducean age, and in the mass we think with them entirely.

And there was Judas, that unhappy soul. Always in thinking of him we must start from this, that Christ loved Judas, Christ believed in Judas, Christ chose Judas with long prayer and deliberation as one of the twelve men whom He loved best to have beside Him, and of whom He hoped the most. Judas was a great soul, or had the makings of that in him. And when we come upon that horror, scarcely human, lying mangled there at the cliff foot, instinctively we look up, and with a shudder of fear and pity see how high he once walked in glory, and from what he fell to this.

The evangelists are frankly not fair to their fallen colleague. Always that ghastly end of his is there before their eyes, and from the very first they find it difficult to mention him without adding with that shiver of soul, they, who could tell the story of the crucifixion without one hot word concerning any one, " who also betrayed Him."

Yet, far from deepening the tragedy, they rather lessen it by that ; because, so doing, unconsciously they leave the

impression on the reader's mind that almost he was chosen for the traitor's part, as an actor is cast to be the villain of the piece, and is marked villain from the start. But it was far more terrible than that. As you will never understand Macbeth until you take it in that it is a most noble nature we are watching crumbling there to ruin, so is it here. How did it happen, and Christ's confident dreams and hopes for him go out in such a starless night? Some there are who will have it that Judas saw the game was lost, and in a kind of maddened fury sought revenge on the man who had fooled him, robbing him of long years of his life. Some, not the least De Quincey, seeing, surely, deeper, hold that Judas' sin was rather this—that Christ's prolonged delay amazed him—set his mind arguing. Is there not here a lack of nerve? Does He not see the tide is at the full, and He must launch out now? that it is turning; that if anything is ever to be done, then it must be at once; that it is running out faster and faster? And still Christ let chance after chance, as Judas judged, go by, and waited, and for what? Things were not growing better, but much worse. The opposition of the leaders had been given time to harden and lay plans. The people had lost much of that first eager passion of reckless enthusiasm with which, had it been seized at once, and rightly used, anything long ago might have been done. Christ was drifting, Judas felt, straight on the rocks. But vigorous action even yet might save the situation; and he planned to bring Christ to a test that He could not evade, to place Him in such a position as would lay compulsion on Him to take action, force his hand, make Him strike. He had lost patience with Christ, thought His plans were maladroit and crude and clumsy and by far too slow, was looking for a short cut, thought that he had found it, took it—and it ended in that horror and the cross!

Too ingenious! Perhaps. Who can see clearly in that utter blackness, or say, with conviction, of a thing so ghastly, thus and thus it must have been?

And yet if that really was Judas' sin, if in a kind of blundering way he meant well, thought that he knew better than his Master, could not wait for Him and His slow, sure, unhurried ways, sought cleverly to force His hand, God pity us! For are we not all apt to do just that! Is the Church ever quite free from a half-bewildered, half-fretful impatience with Him, that can't trust to the steady drip, drip of the weekly services soaking into men's souls, that is irritated by the seeming resultlessness of His appointed methods, must have the kingdom break in with a rush and a loud noise and all men having to take note of it, keeps seeking for a swift immediate revival, not at God's time but now in ours, devising desperate expedients, trying to whistle up the winds of God! And they won't come. And these futilities we thought so wise and good and clever end in nothing except robbing people of their hopes, and so delaying what was in God's mind to give us, what was coming, and might have been here by now, had we not rushed in with our fatuous nothings, our machine-made revivals, our grotesque improvings upon Christ.

It is not so that real revivals rise, but, says Christ, like the winds. We hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence they have come, or where they go. A miner coming home from work is greeted in a courteous fashion by a friendly stranger, and somehow there on the road there rises up within his heart a passion of affection for his fellow-men which makes him give his life for them, and sweeps them by the thousand into the kingdom! "By Thine agony and bloody sweat, by Thy cross and passion, good Lord deliver us," a parson drones on in a cold age in a cold church at a cold service, with a few drowsy people scattered thinly, here and there, only half listening, if that. And suddenly the meaning of the words, breaking through long familiarity, rushes at one woman, seizes on her imagination, makes her see the thing and realize that this is not mere words but a shuddering fact; and a sob bursts from her,

and that emotion spreads all through the church, and out and over a wide stretch of land, and changes lives unnumbered everywhere it passes. God works in His own time, in His own ways. And if we try to dictate to Him, to demand it must be now, and in this fashion we have planned, only confusion comes of that. If we would cease our cunning engineering, our hot organizing, our continual talking and conferring, of which nothing ever seems to come but more conferring, if we would sit quiet and reverent in God's presence, and worship Him, and wait, and give His voice a chance of reaching men instead of ours, how much more might we see! For does our fussiness and cleverness do anything except this, that, like Judas, we get in Christ's way and hinder Him, we who had meant to help, were so sure we could help, had found the very way that must do that! It was impatience with His methods, it was thinking he knew better than his Master, it was running on ahead of Him, that, think some, was the sin of Judas and that brought Christ to His cross. And who of us is not guilty of that?

And Pilate, surely as pathetic a figure as there is in human history. A Roman, with a Roman's sense of justice, he knew at once that these charges against Christ were faked, and with a curt question or two had the poor, bribed, muddled witnesses tripping and falling over their own impossible story, or contradicting one another at all points, quite evidently twisting innocent words into sinister meanings which they did not carry in the Accused's mouth. Tools, thought the man upon the Judgment seat, and looked contemptuously at the hot faces showing through the doors, shouting and bawling yonder, half beside themselves with rage, though they would come no further into a Gentile court, these holy men upon this holy day, lest they might be polluted! How he despised and hated them! The man was fain to baulk them, was quite clear that there was really nothing against the strange silent Prisoner, tried hard to get Him off. And yet he signed the order for the crucifixion, and goes down

to history, hooted and pelted with the infamy of every race. Why did he not leap to his feet and cry, "This is mere malice and not a substantial charge. The Prisoner is acquitted! And as for you, be off with you, lest you stand in His place!" Why, like a noble creature caught fast in a trap, does he only snarl and show his teeth, and struggle and long to hurl himself at his taunting enemies, and yet cannot break free?

They say it was old sins that troubled him, the past failures of the man that made things difficult for him now. There had been days when he had been too hectoring and domineering; so at least these impossible people said, though he himself denied it still. At all events, protesting to Rome, they had won the Emperor's ear, and humbled their governor. And that must not happen again. Ah me! is not this life of ours a fearsome thing? Take care! take care! For if you sin that sin, be sure that somehow you will pay for it. And it may be at how hideous a price! So Pilate found in his day; so you, too, will find in ours.

> "Our acts follow us from afar,
> And what we have been makes us what we are."

Only God knows what may come out of that, if you give way to it. Pilate was curt and domineering to the Jews one day. And it was because of that that months later his unwilling hands set up the cross of Christ; unwilling—but they did it. Take you care! For sin is very merciless. If you have had the sweet, it will see to it that you quaff the bitter to the very dregs. Think, think, and take you care!

Yes, but there is another very terrible fact. Fitz-James Stephen thought that Pilate's report of Christ's trial would make, could it be found, one of the most arresting state papers in history. And this, not only because of the Prisoner's personality, but because of the strong case that Pilate could make out for himself. There had been trouble before; there was always trouble with these pestilent Jews, with

their mad hearts and touchy patriotism, quick to read offence in just nothing at all, and so unyielding about even their smallest rights. And Rome had laid it down that they must not be irritated. And yet here out of nowhere the old trouble was breaking out once more, and that at the worst possible time in the whole year, when the city was thronged and overflowing far into the country upon every side with multitudes of fanatical creatures, two millions of them, it is said, only too ready and willing to be enflamed. These wretched priests would soon have this inflammable mass ablaze, and once more the gutters would be running blood. And that was not to be. The orders given him were strict that bloodshed was to be avoided, and that peace must be kept unbroken. And thus, looking at it from Pilate's standpoint, it comes down to this that it was to keep peace Christ's cross was set up on Calvary. "It is expedient that one man die for the people," so Caiaphas announced. And Pilate, put in a cruel dilemma, came at last to that of it too. The Man was innocent. But did he set Him free—far worse was bound to happen; lives by the score would be sacrificed; and who could say where it would end? We must have peace. That was the one fixed point. And yet he hesitated, was unwilling. If only this had happened any other time! But with these Passover crowds about I cannot risk it. Peace we must have; and He must die. Quite plainly Pilate was impressed by Christ. Yet no doubt there is something in what Luther says. "Pilate took our Saviour Christ to be a simple, honest, ignorant man, one perchance come out of a wilderness; a simple fellow, a hermit who knew or understood nothing of the world or of government." Yes, it was a pity, but He must die.

For us, looking on, it is easy to say that if the Man was innocent then let the heavens fall, but let justice be done. Yet not so long ago, in our own empire, a mob gathered where they had been forbidden, and a volley was fired, several volleys; and a thrill of horror swept us. But when those

in authority stated that in their belief not to have fired meant an uprising and ugly massacres over a widespread area, we all settled down again, reflecting that it was a dreadful position in which they were placed, and no doubt they did what was best where nothing could be really good ; and said no more about it. They must judge, they there upon the spot. Pilate, too, had to judge upon the spot. And, looking long at Jesus, slowly he brought himself to vote for peace.

And we had better think of that. For to-day we are all agog for peace—must have it. For us, too, that seems to be our one fixed point. And it is little wonder. For those who have once seen war have no desire ever again to see it. The thing is an insanity. For, quite obviously, to hurl chunks of metal at each other can prove nothing as to the original dispute. And we do well to labour zealously to make it a bad dream, and a forgotten horror left behind. For no man can imagine what another war with all the devilments of science thrown in to the full would be. Yet we can go too far in our pursuit of peace. Is our zeal for it altogether pure, or partly that of a tired world that is not going to make any further sacrifices ? Peace ! Peace ! we cry. Yet, after all, is peace the main thing ? What about righteousness ? Was Pilate right ? And are we not beginning to slip down into his mood. Two little nations begin snarling at each other. And we are very bold. Be off, we say ; and they slink away, making faces at each other. But a great power bullies a little one, and hotly announces it will brook no interference, that this touches its national honour. And we all carefully gaze the other way. We must have peace, you see. But must we ? What about righteousness ? Was Pilate right ? Ekken, one of the greatest of Japanese philosophers remarks that " if a man will not give his life for righteousness he does not know the relative values of righteousness and life." " He dodges trouble," House said about Wilson, long before the war. And because, in the

world's evil day, a man like that held his position, millions of people in how many lands use that unhappy soul as the last test of their Christianity. "Forgive us our trespasses," they say, "as we forgive them who have trespassed against us." And then they pause, and wonder, is that true? Do I forgive the man, but for whose dodging of trouble my boy would have been alive to-day. And they are not quite sure. Pilate, too, tried to dodge trouble. But you can't. Are we, too, trying that? Are we, too, sinking to that level? What if a day come when you can't have peace and righteousness? What if the gutters must just run with blood, and our homes again be broken, and our hearts along with them, or Christ be led to Calvary? What then?

Lastly, there was the people, the kindly, decent, foolish, likeable, thoughtless people. For in the end, as always, it was really they who were responsible. It was they who did it; for they could have stopped it. And they had their chance. When Pilate left it to them, no doubt he was quite certain he had found the way to free Christ. For he must have known of the enthusiasm for Him in the streets, of the long roar of rapturous welcome, must have been aware how many in the city Christ had healed, them or their dear ones. There could be no doubt, he must have felt, about the popular verdict. Christ's reprieve was sure. And he was plainly taken aback and disconcerted when there came that long shout for Barabbas, and no single voice for Christ. It was only a little gathering, of course. But where were the others, those on whom Pilate had relied. They must have heard of Christ's arrest and trial, yet they were not there, had not sufficient interest to be there, they who, if they had been there, could have saved Him. Why did they fail? How did they make themselves responsible for this ghastly horror? Oh well, there were the usual excuses we all make. After all it was no affair of theirs, you know. They were busy sight-seeing; for it was not often they were up in the

capital. Some of them, it may even be, had not been there before. They had their friends to look up, and these had detained them. Or they were worshipping in the temple. Or, like enough, they felt there was no need for them to hurry to the court. Christ could not be in any pressing danger. He would be all right. The others would be there to shout for Him. There was no lack of voices yesterday. They need not bother running through the heat. And so, because every one felt there was no need for him, and was not there, Christ died—a perfectly unnecessary death, if only even a few had done their part. Let us remember that. For is it not just so that things that the world cries for get delayed and frustrated. Not through ill-will, not through hostility, but people can't be bothered voting, keep indoors, feel they could make no difference, will never be missed. Yet we can all do something that would help. Not much perhaps, yet yours, and yours, and yours, and mine, added together, would be quite enough. And it is because these littles we could offer are awanting nothing happens, and the shame goes on. "When I see a poor devil drunk and brutal," said Morris, "I always feel a sort of shame as if I myself had some hand in it." We have. We are responsible. Their blood is upon us and on our children. We are not hostile, we are not indifferent, we are not against it. But we are not there. And so again Christ dies.

So true is it, as Paul cries with eyes glazed with horror, that we, too, you and I, have crucified the Lord of Glory, and have put Him to an open shame. It was not something gross, unthinkable, obscene, that brought Christ to His cross, but little decent sins of ordinary decent people such as we sin every day. Look at your hands, and make sure you have not Christ's blood upon them even now!

X

WHAT HAPPENS AT CALVARY

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."—GAL. vi. 14.

THERE were three crosses upon Calvary that day the Lord Christ died. Our Saviour's was set up in the centre. And on His left hung a poor soul, writhing, maddened, cursing, spitting out hate in Christ's direction—why, who can tell? Perhaps he had harboured a half thought that Christ might save Himself and them; and when nothing happened, this last disappointment broke his self-control. Perhaps his brain, half crazy with the pain, had a dim impossible notion that if he out-topped their insults, added a new bite and sting to the venom they were flinging at Christ, even yet he might catch their favour, and wheedle a reprieve out of them. In any case, there he hung, writhing, cursing, maddened. And on the right was a soul wading through that fearsome rush of cold, black, swollen waters in a great calm. For he had caught courage and chivalry from that strange fellow-sufferer from whom he could not take his eyes, and before whom his soul bowed down—he who had never brooked authority, he with his wild life and his untamed heart!—in instinctive allegiance. There were three crosses upon Calvary. Which thing, it would appear, turns out to be a kind of parable. For, in this passage and elsewhere, Paul lays it down with confidence that whenever this tremendous thing becomes effective in a life, there, too, there

are three crosses ; and two others besides Christ are nailed down ruthlessly and left remorselessly to die.

Always, of course, it is that central cross that draws men's eyes and holds their hearts. The old geographers assumed that the spot where it stood must be the centre of the world. And so, in a way deeper than theirs, it is. Yet at the time it seemed a passing insignificant affair. When the tramp of the soldiers echoed in the streets the women ran out of their houses and people gathered suddenly from nowhere. For they knew what it would be. They lived upon the route to Calvary ; and every day or so some unfortunate wretches were led out, who were not there when in the evening the troops marched back to barracks. " Poor soul," they said as Jesus passed, and shuddered at His coming fate, wept a little over it, stood looking after Him till He was out of sight. And then ? Why, then they ran back to the household duties that were waiting for them. The children must be got ready for school as usual ; and by and by a man would be coming home, hungry and tired. Ordinary life, real life, their life, surged back again, and blotted that episode outside of it from off their bustled minds. A little lower down the streets, perhaps, there were bargainers haggling over a deal, and they looked up. Ah ! they said, so it has come to that of it ! I once thought He might be the Messiah ! But the scribes told me not to be a fool. And indeed He did speak queerly about God. So I drew out of it. And wisely, as it seems. Well, how much must you have for it ? I'll give you half !

And yet, passing and squalid in its outward circumstances though it seemed, that wayside scene has proved to be far and away the most momentous happening in human history. To this day, now more than ever, as Mr. Bernard Shaw will tell you, whenever things grow dark, and God's ways difficult to understand, and their own minds are puzzled and confused, people gather on Calvary, and stand and look. And as they look, somehow their hearts rally, and light breaks

in on them again, and they see meaning dawning where it seemed that there was none.

Why? What happened on Calvary! How has this cross of shame become an evangelist that has taught us more, far more about God and the deep things of life than all the prophets of all the nations, than all that God's eager grace, ceaselessly toiling, planning, giving, has managed to devise elsewhere to help us put together?

Erskine of Linlathen used to be appalled by what he called the dumbness of God. He cried to Him, and it seemed lost in the dead heavens that made never a sign; He prayed, and there came back no audible answer. If only He could speak to me, so that I might hear! he cried. And once, he said, God did. Once He broke silence. I don't know what he meant by that, do you? And yet it is no bad description of what Christians feel on Calvary. Always they had thought, and hoped, and dreamed, and wondered about God. If only He were this, and ah, if He were really that! But at the Cross He breaks silence, the veil is rent from top to bottom, and they find themselves looking up into God's very face, seeing Him as He really is, hearing Him speaking, as it were, with His own very voice to very them. And what a wonderful message it is that comes through!

Elsewhere it is not easy to believe God loves us. For how can He, and why should He? Newman, indeed, bluntly declared that He would have been just as happy if we had never been created, and would be just as happy though we were all blotted out of creation again. But that is the religion of a monk, who talks about the fatherhood of God from the outside, knowing nothing about it. There is no woman who has ever lost a child but will tell you fiercely that that is a lie. And at the Cross we know it is a lie, know that of the shabbiest of us who has no statable case at all, it is still true that God has missed him, has been seeking for him, cannot rest without him, will go any length to save him from himself, and lure him home again.

Years ago as a boy I heard George Adam Smith preaching in Edinburgh. The sermon has all flown, save this one illustration. He told us how a trawler had put out from Aberdeen, and in wild weather a tremendous sea swept away the skipper's laddie from before his very eyes. And in that dreadful moment, when for an agonizing second he saw his boy's arms stretched out appealingly to him who could do nothing, ere the white snarl of boiling waters dragged him down, "I understood," he said, for the first time the meaning of a verse that I had known from childhood, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." And at the Cross we understand what God means when He talks of loving us, begin to take it in that there is nothing that He will not do, no sacrifice He will not make, no suffering that He will shirk, if only He can help us. "He loved me," said Paul, standing upon Calvary and gazing in a stunned way at the cross, I who was a persecutor, and a blasphemer, and injurious, and yet "He loved me, and He gave Himself for me." And with that the man's heart broke, and the old life was gone.

Elsewhere it is not easy to believe in the forgiveness of sins. Cheap superficial natures, indeed, take it as a thing of course, no great affair, as only what is natural, feel little or no wonder that the great and holy God should bear with us who have been so stubborn, deliberate, impudent in our offences. But greater souls are staggered. "Why should He act like that?" our conscience cries. And, judged by human standards, there is no reason at all. Yet at the cross, somehow we know He does. Do you remember the lad in Stevenson, returning from the duel in which he had been quite sure that his life must be forfeited, for he had never an idea how to handle a rapier, had hardly so much as touched a weapon in his life, how he heard his heart singing and his very footfalls beating out from the paving stones that joyous chant, "Surely the bitterness of death is past!" So, as they come down from Calvary, men and women hear their hearts

also singing like a happy child, and their feet echoing that marvellous assertion which they know to be a fact—I believe, I believe, I believe in the forgiveness of sins!

If your sin has found you out, if your conscience is roused and raw and hectoring, if you have learned that this is a moral world, and that, because you have soiled yourself with evil, forces that there is no evading are out and upon your track, and that somewhere they must inevitably run you down, get you to Calvary. I do not know if even God can spare us all the consequences of our foolishness. Hegel declared the sinful soul has a right to its punishment, and Plato that it will run eagerly to its judge. And even our meaner souls can see that to get off is not the chiefest thing; although, if He can manage it for us, that, too, we shall accept humbly and very gratefully. But I do know that upon Calvary you will become entirely sure God's heart is with you, and that He is doing everything that even God can do to help and heal and save you, that He whom you thought must be angry is full of compassion, that while you have been brooding over your failure He has contrived a wonderful second chance for you, that though you have been gulping down that "self-contempt bitterer to drink than blood," He still loves you, believes in you, trusts you, will not give you up.

You remember how in Bunyan it was only when the pilgrim came in sight of the cross that his burden loosed from off his back and fell and rolled into the open sepulchre, and he saw it no more; and that he stood there a long time, weeping, laughing, wondering. For it seemed very strange that the sight of a cross could free him from his guilt and sin. And yet it does. Really, it does. There are millions of witnesses to that. And if here to-day you can contrive to catch a glimpse of it, you, too, will find that that is really so, will hear God saying to you what the author of the *Theologia Germanica* once heard from Him. "Verily I will recompense your evil. But it must be with good. For I am and have nothing else."

But if Christ's death is to become effective in our characters and lives, if we are not to fall into the horror of misusing Calvary, and end by being worse for it, not better, there must be two other crosses.

"I have crucified the world," says Paul. That word, the world, is used in Scripture with varying meanings. Sometimes it stands simply for the numbers of our fellow-men and women round about us. And, in that sense, God loves the world—the foolish, ailing, blundering, kindly, human, stumbling world—loves it well enough to give His Son for it. And we must learn to love it too. But often the world means that vague, dim, ever-present, threatening mass of things inimical to the soul; the currents that sweep one away from what is high and true and unselfish; the pressure of the crowd about us tending to carry us along with it into the customary, the mean, the earthy; the throng of interests that crowd our minds and leave no room for Christ. Whatever robs God of our allegiance, whatever cheats us out of our inheritance in Him, whatever drags us down and back, that is the world; not necessarily anything evil in itself—that is more the flesh and the devil—but just the fulness of life, the rush of things, the babble of affairs, our dreams and hopes and ambitions and desires. Matters quite harmless, even true and beautiful in themselves, can grow into one's world. A man's home, says Christ, can become his world —even the wonderful gift of human love! For he may sink back luxuriously into that, grow soft and flabby and self-indulgent, and forget that those about him need his help. Or a man's business, it seems, can become his world; though surely we are given our talents to use and not to let them rust. Yet we can grow so one-idead, so absorbed in it, that "getting and spending we lay waste our powers"; and the soul forgotten, left untended, sinks and flickers, and goes out. Our success can become our world, and we intemperate for more and more and more of it. If anything is crowding God out of your life, if anything is making you throw aside the

dreams and hopes and high purposes with which you started as quite obviously impracticable, if anything is convincing you that of course Jesus' teaching is mere poetry that can't be taken seriously, and is not meant for literal obedience, that is the world for you. And it is through things like that that souls are mostly lost. The flesh and the devil are open enemies. But the world is far more subtle and insidious and deadly. "Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present world," says Paul. Here was a man who felt the pull of Christ, and greatly dared for Him. And then somebody offered him a fine position, and he took it, and drew out of the great adventure, preferring to rock idly in the fat, smooth, oily waters of some safe little harbour to wrestling with hurricanes out in the open sea. Or a lassie who did not care to face the peril of discipleship came into his life. And he chose her, and turned his back on Christ. Just that, yet the great preacher has that terrible picture of how Demas died, and men who knew him when they met each other shook sorrowful heads, and told each other how he would be missed, he with his shrewdness, and his soundness of judgment, and his dependability. And at that very moment at the Judgment-seat of God he was being condemned, was shrieking in an agony that there was some ghastly mistake. "I am not Judas," he kept crying, "I am Demas; D–e–m–a–s," he spelt out in a screech of frenzy; "a man against whom there is not one breath of scandal." But in vain. And you, too, will have to pass through Vanity Fair; and at every booth eager hucksters will thrust their tawdry nothings into your face, and plead and press for custom. You also must meet Madam Bubble with her many-coloured wares, how beautiful, and yet a touch, and they have vanished. You can't evade the ordeal. "I pray," said Christ, "not that Thou shouldest take then out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." We must live in the world, must do our part to keep the great earth spinning round and round. But we must not be of it, must not drift into adopting its

aims, its ends, its standards, its ambitions, its methods and ways. And not to do so is so hard.

You with your life still in your hand, what are you going to do with it? "I am dreaming," says Calderon, "and I wish to act rightly; for good deeds are not lost, though they be wrought in dreams." Are you dreaming rightly? What are you going to do with life? Be sure the world will tempt you, wheedle you, coax you, bid you look at its gifts and ask you where you can find anything so splendid. And yet before you pay it down, look again at that life of yours. When they asked Christ if one should pay tribute to Cæsar or should not, "Shew Me a penny," He replied; and looked at it, and then, "Whose image and superscription is this?" He asked. And they said, "Cæsar's." "Then render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's." Look at your life again. It is God's image that you carry; it is for God's use you were fashioned; it is His superscription that you bear. Render to God the thing that is God's, and do not throw it away on what can never satisfy you.

For you remember Browning? How he felt he had chosen the world and got it. Take it, said God, glut yourself upon it. And the man went his way, hugging his treasure to his heart, a whole eternity of all that he had ever wished for really his! Yet by and by there crept into his soul a restlessness, a doubt, an ennui, a boredom, a satiety, a loathing, till it grew a horror. To be chained to all eternity to what had rotted into a disgust! O Lord God, punish me, he cried, but give me hope. You are bigger and greater than you think, and only God can really satisfy you. Climb Calvary before you make your choice. Stand here under the shadow of the Cross, and, looking up into Christ's face, must you not say, "I will not live for my own aims and ends and comforts and advancement, I will not throw away my life on selfishness, I will not think first of self-interest. To me to live is Christ. And this world that so haunts me, claims me, follows me, I will not have.

But I reject it, and condemn it, I cast it forth, I crucify it, nailing it down, however it may coax and plead, however it may writhe and struggle, whatever it may promise for a respite, for a compromise, for just the smallest place within my heart."

And if you will not, then a day must come when God will take that selfish thing you have become into His hand, and look at you, and say, This is and can be no of manner of use to Me ! Out of the common dust that blows about the streets I can fashion the lovely blue of heaven, out of the very refuse of the world I can coax out the glory of the flowers, out of a little common water I can make the music of the burns singing among the heather, and the depth and the distance and the mystery of the sea ; but with this even I can do nothing at all. And He will toss you from Him.

But we must take action yet more drastic, Paul maintains. " I am crucified with Christ," my evil nature, all that is unworthy in me has been nailed down upon the hard wood. It is not dead as yet. Always it pleads, often it struggles, sometimes it wrenches a hand free. But I remain implacable and force it down once more. And if that is not happening, he declares, if you and I are not obtaining power from Christ to master our natural failings, then for us, so far, the faith has come to absolutely nothing, and we must take a firmer grip on Christ. Well, is it happening ? Is our Christianity having effect upon our character, cleansing our lives, subduing our besetting sins ? If not, then what exactly do we think that it is for ? And how do we conceive that we are the better for Christ ? Newman—to quote him again—once wrote Mozley a gravely friendly letter, warning him that he was disappointing those who liked him and believed in him, that after years of trusting him to rally and shake off his weaknesses, his old habit of wasting his time seemed every whit as strong as ever, that the two men who knew him best saw no improvement. And yet, he cried, what are we here for except to conquer our besetting sins ? And might not Christ say that of us ?

Our life runs on, and we talk much about our faith, but still follow our natural instincts, do as others do, no better if no worse. He lavishes His grace on us, with what result judged by the hard facts of our daily living ? Are we like that stout-hearted soul upon His right, learning from Him to bear the pain of our self-crucifixion with patience and with bravery ? Are we really nailing down to Christ's cross our own evil ways and nature ? Are we dying with Christ, that we may rise with Him into a newer, better, far more splendid life ?

And there is more. That day that Christ spoke of the Cross, and Peter, startled and dismayed, cried to Him that He must not talk like that, Christ said, " But, Peter, there is nothing singular, except in degree, in anything that I am doing. For every friend of mine must, every day he lives, take up his cross upon his shoulder, and follow in My steps to Calvary." There is, indeed, only one Saviour. But often our Lord tells us that He needs and claims our help in His saving of the world. We must fill up His sufferings : we must carry on His work, must take His salvation and apply it to the needs and sores of our own time, must catch His spirit, the very spirit of Calvary, and live it out in all our thinking, all our acting, all our living, in politics and business, at home, and in the world. That is what we are for. We hear of the miseries of the poor, see something of it all with our own eyes, and it won't do for Christian people to pass by on the other side. It is for us to offer to bear loss and sacrifice, yes, willingly and eagerly, if thereby we can help ; to accept a life far more meagre for ourselves than we might wish, if thereby others can be given the chance that surely ought to fall to them by right ; to gain something of the Master's divine liberality, and make our bearing of His Cross a real thing, and not empty, tinkling words.

And in this babble of self-interest, when every class keeps shouting about rights, and all men's aims appear to be an easier lot, more comfort, greater means, less call upon them ; a lubberland where never a cold wind blows, and this

machinery that has made men of us is broken up, and every one has everything that everybody wants, and the fulfilments of our dearest dreams fall ripe into our mouths as we lie lazily upon our backs, it is for the Church not only to keep preaching more self-sacrifice to others, but for itself to lead the way to that; and for us Christian people to make clear that we still stand to Jesus' teaching, still believe that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things that he possesseth, but in what he can do and be and suffer for his fellows and for God, still hold with all our souls and prove it in our daily living that the real crown of life is service, and the apex of our human glory sacrifice, and the greatest splendour of the world, the thing to aim at, and to covet and to imitate, Christ's Cross. Always, it has been when it came with a challenging call to gallantry, to sacrifice, to loss, that religion has swept the world, and rushed men's valiant hearts. And not otherwise will we win them to-day.

And if you ask, "But where do I come in?" you don't come in at all! For you are dead (that is the essence of the faith); and henceforth are to live, not for yourself, but God and others. And if your hearts shrink from that, and whimper, But it is my life, and I would rather use and keep it for myself! Well, there was once a countryside in which they were unanimous, except for one dissentient, that they just could not have Christ in their midst. It was all very well, they said—His healings and His miracles, but what about their pigs? That was what stuck fast in their throats. This most upsetting person with so little regard for the rights of property made things so unsettled and uneasy and uncomfortable! A maniac here and there might be restored, but look at the price we have to pay for it! And what will He do next? No, no, He would be far better away. And so they edged Him to the shore, and felt a good deal happier when the ribbon of water between Him and them had widened into a broad gulf. And is it possible that face to face with all the splendour that Christ offers you of sacrifice and

helpfulness and God's own use of life you hesitate, are not impressed, prefer your bits of comfort and self-interest. Then have your pigs, you who are only swine yourselves, jostling and squealing round the muddy troughs!

But surely it is not so! Surely you, too, here on Calvary, ay, anywhere and everywhere, once you have stood under its solemn yet ennobling shadow, must cry out with Paul, "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of Jesus Christ," and in my chance of following in His steps, of living my life also in His way.

XI

HOW SPRING COMES TO THE SOUL

"I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth, and believeth in Me, shall never die. Believest thou this?"—JOHN xi. 25, 26.

THIS is a passage which our minds associate, almost instinctively, with those solemn days when there was a hush and eerie stillness in the house, a loneliness and aching in the heart; with those dread moments when even the dear dust to which we clung had to be taken from us; and to poor souls, sitting tense, and gathering themselves together to see it through with honour, there came these healing words like a cool hand laid on a hot and throbbing forehead. And, with that, somehow the wild surge and heaving of our unquiet spirits grew greatly calmer; a splendid hope, far off but really there, sprang up into being and burned steadily even in those fierce gusts. It was not over then, and what we loved had not gone out, but somewhere was still real as ever; and one day, please God, we should find and have and keep our own once more.

And, without question, that is, of course, the original setting and final meaning of it all. Only, why should we limit it to that? Christ Himself never did. He had many metaphors to bring home to us something of the difference He makes, but this was His favourite which He often used. He drew many vivid pictures of it, trying now this, and now that—that peasant on his wind-swept mountain croft, gazing astounded at the glint and glitter of the gold he has

unearthed, for ever done with poverty, he who had always been so very poor!—that foolish laddie safely home again, with more than his best dreams come really true; and ah! how good it is to be clean again from the filth round the swine-troughs yonder, no longer poor, starved, miserable, unregarded, but shut into an atmosphere of eager kindness, where love runs to meet him, delighting to heap up its best on his unworthiness, letting him see how much it means to it to have him really home—wonderful pictures! And yet, while He fingers this, and suggests that, always He turns back to this other, as being closest to the truth. Let Me have entrance into any life, He claims, the bleakest, barest, dullest, where everything looks withered and dry and wilted, and there is never a sound of running water anywhere, nothing but heat and glare and dust and deadness, and with My entrance spring has come, and everywhere there are life, greenness, colour; hopes, dead so long you had forgotten all about them, will emerge out of their deep, ancient graves; hearts that had grown beaten and soured and cynical and worldly wise, will become young and like a child's again with the old wonder, and the old enthusiasm, and the old daring and implicit faith; there will be life where there is no life, and a resurrection where that seems impossible, and in yet another soul it will all have come true.

And this is no promise only for a far-off sometime on the grave's farther side. But here and now it can work out. Wherever I am, so Christ says, that follows. For I am Resurrection, I am Life, and you can count on this when you have Me.

But—Christ is here. We have His solemn covenant and tryst. And what if it should really happen to us, really here, and really now! You remember how, in Browning's picture of John's death, the little knot stood round and watched him sinking lower and yet lower, till the flame of life flickered, and, as it seemed, went out. And at that a blankness, cold as a crawling sea-mist, filled their hearts,

For the last of those who had known Christ was gone ; and there was no one left now who could say " I saw," " I heard." And, much as these had told them, how much they had carried with them unrecorded, lost to a world greedy for any crumb of Christ. So it was desperately they kept seeking, seeking to coax back a tiny spark to the heart not yet cold ; tried this, tried that, in vain. Till a lad, stung with the splendour of a sudden thought, ran for the gospel, found the place, and read, " I am the Resurrection, and the Life." Whereat the seemingly dead man sat up, hearing again his Lord's authoritative voice, and poured out all his soul in one last glorious talk. And Christ is here. If only we expect that, credit that, believe that, we should go our way, with a new enthusiasm, a new purpose, a new power within us, no longer dead but living, eager, well, yes with a whole new glorious chapter added to the ever-growing gospel that records the wonders He did here for us to-day. I promise it, says Christ. It must be so, if My touch really fall on you. For I am Resurrection, I am Life.

And He makes no exceptions ; says so looking straight at you. Isn't one of the most glorious things about the Master the valiant way in which He is always willing to join issue on ground the least advantageous to Himself, makes straight for the most desperate cases, and says boldly, " Let us take this as the test." We are told that there was a whole multitude of ailing people in those porches of Bethesda that day Christ was there. But there was one who caught the eye as obviously the most pitiful of them all, a man with a wan, hopeless face, who had lain there for eight-and-thirty years, and was no better—rather worse—and half of life was gone, consumed there in a longing that had come to absolutely nothing. I have no chance, so He told Christ. Others are not so ill as I, and they have friends to help them. But I have none, am all alone, am also in a desperate plight ; and always while I am slowly scrambling to my feet and stumbling towards the water, almost before I am started the chance is

over, some one else is healed, and for me there is nothing except to crawl back again to the accustomed place, and wait all through another long interminable dreary day for the next opportunity, which I shall lose too when it comes. I have no chance. Oh! I keep trying, in a dogged kind of way, but there is never a ray of hope. Some fourteen thousand times I have attempted it; and fourteen thousand times or so have failed. There is no chance. And Christ made straight for him; not to some easy case, but to this desperate soul. We will test matters here, He said.

Or, once He came to a village, and heard much of an impossible woman, as the neighbours all described her. She is just evil incarnate, so they said. Every possible devil has its home within her heart. And who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. I can, said Christ, and dared to call, of all possible people, Mary Magdalene! And she came.

So to-day He stands among us, and looks round for the most desperate case. That is His big brave way. Some of you, no doubt, have come into God's house with thanksgiving and praise, awed to discover in your own experience how real Christ's power is, how efficient face to face with the actual problems and the practical tangles of your life. This He has taught me, so your heart acknowledges gratefully; and from this He has saved me; and that old sore is healed and gone. It is all gloriously true, so you have found—not simply beautiful words, but a real thing that works. Well, you will have happy communion with Him to-day. For it is the pure in heart that see God; and "the taught already that profit by teaching."

And yet I do not know that you will get the closest to Christ. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick." And while He smiles at you, made happier by your happiness, His eyes keep searching here and there for some one who has even greater need of Him. Is any one tired, He asks, and beaten and disappointed and—— Yes, you cry, interrupting; Yes.

What is it ? What is wrong ? Talk it out frankly with the Master. They tell us that St. Bernard, because of some unseemliness in his theological thinking, is condemned to all eternity to wear a black splash even on his shining garments yonder. If that be so, must not his eyes keep straying back to that uneasily. And do you feel ashamed to come again to Christ after the failures of the past, after your many promises which you have never kept, after the vows you made, meaning them at the time, and yet so quickly forgot, after the endless disappointments you have caused Him. Can one come again ? Is it fair to promise now that we know we cannot keep our vows. Luther thought not, was of opinion that that kind of thing might easily become " one of the most mischievous diseases born in us," might keep lulling our consciences to sleep whenever they were challenged, though there was no real difference in us. " For my part I have so often deceived our Lord God by promising to be upright and good, that I will promise no more, but will only pray for a happy hour, when it shall please God to make me good." And so you hang back, wistful, shy, discouraged, so conscious of the black spots on your garments, that you can scarcely look away from your unworthiness into your Saviour's eager face and outstretched, welcoming hands.

Or is it that your story, too, corroborates that so reiterated witness of the poets, that life as it proceeds loses its glory, that ideals dim and hopes go out, that, even after all that Christ can do, things seem to slip back on the whole, as for Wordsworth the glory died. " I see by glimpses now, when age comes on may scarcely see at all." Or at least are you daunted that so little happens, Christ or no Christ, in your case ? The Kings and Chronicles are full of marvellous breaks-in of God, and perhaps we don't question them. Only it does not seem to be so in our day, and in this modern world of ours where things have surely grown much drabber, and more unexciting. We do see that faith is doing wonders in lives round about us ; but in our own it seems

much tamer, more prosaic, far more commonplace. And we jog on, hoping, believing, trying in a way, yet what is there to show for it ? And hearing that, our Lord makes straight in your direction, threading His way through all the others. We shall test matters here, He says. " He that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." If only we can coax a little faith into your heart, in you too it will happen, so He claims ; and He says it confidently.

And, perhaps, you are moved and stirred a moment by that trust of His, and then you push it from you almost peevishly. If ! If ! No doubt ! But how can that be done ? That is the problem. There were once mighty cities that held the whole world in fee, and through their streets there hummed the murmur of a full, rich, busy life. And they are gone, gone utterly, so that to-day only the desert sand lies thick above them, and the desert winds moan eerily where once there were that pomp and splendour. And who can go, and stand in these lone desolations, and cry " Rise ye, dead," and bring it back to life ? That cannot be : it is all vanished utterly for ever. And how can faith, the old faith, come back to me now ? For even the Cross seems to have lost for me its old compulsion. It does not shame me, move me, haunt me, win me, as it used to do. I have grown so accustomed to it that I hardly notice it. My heart seems dead, and can't feel any more.

But Christ looks at you unafraid, sure He can manage even for you. Once on a day they burst out into open laughter in His very face. The lassie is dead, they said bluntly ; hope is out, the thing is over. But Christ put them all forth, and shut the door, with a set look of determination on His face. And as He looks at you too, that same look is there. Do not you be so dourly sure that all is over. For this is a wonderful Master, who accomplishes amazing things. Don't you remember how one day a merry jest went round the town ; at every street corner they were laughing over it. Have you heard the latest about the new

prophet? one would tell the other delightedly. He has called, whom do you think? I will give you ten guesses. No! no! far better than that! Of all possible people, Matthew! But He did! I was there, and I heard Him, and He was quite serious too, went up to the booth and asked him, and He seemed to think that he would go. Fancy old Matthew off on an adventurous crusade! No! no! he sticks to his money-bags, if anybody does! But the laugh died away, and they stood looking at each other foolishly, when it got noised abroad that Matthew had gone. And now that same Christ is making His way through the press to you, believes that it is in you also. If we can only rouse a little faith, a very little for a start, anything is still possible, He says; yes, even if your heart is dead, stone dead, you can be brought to life again. Pater declared of Michelangelo, "with him the very rocks seem to have life—they have but to cast away the dust and scurf that they may rise and stand on their feet." And Christ's eyes watch you hopefully, quite certain you are going, poor dead thing though you may be, to cast away the dust and scurf, to rise and stand up on your feet a living soul, erect, and with eyes that look up toward God.

To which you answer, Yes, yes, I know! I, too, have been through that, have had experience of it often and often. And it is very wonderful. Only it does not last. When the rains of God fall in the hills, even my muddy channel, far down in the tame valleys, fills with a rush of spiritual fervour. But the spate soon dies away again; and the old, ugly flats emerge once more, muddy as ever! "There are ten men in me," cries Amiel in despair, "according to time, place, surrounding, occasion; and, in my restless diversity, I am for ever escaping myself." And, indeed, it is difficult to walk for long in step with our best self. For, as he says again, "This nature is, as it were, only one of the men which exist in me. It is one of my departments. It is not the whole of my territory, the whole of my inner kingdom."

No, in spite of this and that rise in it, that, on the whole, is a flat land; and we can't heave up mountain ranges and live there in that pure air. You can't by thinking add a cubit to your stature. And I am built on mean unspiritual lines, and even Christ can't make me bigger, not permanently, not for long. But Christ challenges that. Just that. "The Holy Spirit," wrote Père Didon, "is within you, working as burning lava works. He will have a hard task, for the peaks which are scarcely showing and on which you have to dwell in future, have to be uplifted." But He will do it. The end, says Christ, is not to be a broken hope, a withered dream, a faded possibility, a soul that might have come to something but was lost. No, "He that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." "Because I live, you shall live also." As if to say, surely you know that I share everything I have with you! And do you think I can have life, and not share that; that I can be content without you? So long as I Myself have life, you can count upon Me. And you will never die, if only we can get that spark of faith alight.

But how is that to be accomplished? Look at Martha's case. "Even now," she said, "I know that whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it you." Can you say that? Even now, if Christ asked it, even yet! Dare you deny that? But we know that Christ is praying for us. Does not the Church picture Him as the great High Priest within the veil, pleading and making intercession for His people. And surely, could we hear Him, He is now asking for you, "O Father, Thou who givest faith, here is a poor needy soul with none, grant it at least a little, lest I lose this one of those whom Thou hast given Me." And what Christ asks for He receives. "Believest thou that?"

Or, if your heart is still cold and unmoved, think about this. Christ has a very gracious way of proving better than His promises, of doing more, far more, even than He had

covenanted, gracious though that was. As, for example, often He tells us that we must have faith, that we can count upon Him, but we must have faith, or else even He can gain no foothold in our life from which to work. And yet I can show a case where there was no faith, and it was there He did the most astounding of His miracles. Ask, He kept saying, and it shall be given you ; yet I can point you to a group who never asked, and upon them He heaped far and away the greatest of His gifts. " Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with Me." Yet, once the door was never opened, was kept locked. And still, breaking through His own conditions, He came even then and even there.

Don't you remember that room in Jerusalem where the disciples met after the Crucifixion ? They had no faith, no hope, no glimmer of expectation. All was over, and the dream was dead. Badly scared men, they huddled there. " Keep that door locked," they cried. Dark looks, they felt, were being cast at them out on the street. What was that they were saying as we passed ? Calvary was so near ; and crucifixion was so horrible a death. " Keep that door locked ! " We must scatter and separate ; are not safe here in this unfriendly city ; must bury ourselves somewhere where the ridicule of men will not hoot us through life, and shame and madden us. They had no faith : the door was locked. And yet to them Christ came, and stood there in the midst of that locked room, and they all saw Him and all heard Him saying, " Peace be unto you ! "

There, surely, is your chance. " O Christ, I have no faith, only a cold, hard, heedless heart, and though I hear Thee knocking, knocking, knocking, can't be bothered opening to Thee ; or, even if I would, my fumbling fingers can't push back the bolts ; and indeed they are stiff and ill to move, and my dour rusty will won't will when and what I will that it should will. Cannot Thou to me also, though

the door is locked, and my heart dull and dead and faithless, cannot Thou to me also find some way to come in? 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.'" And at your very side will He not answer, "I am come that you may have life, and have it more abundantly"?

XII

ON A WISE PRODIGALITY: A REMEMBRANCE DAY SERMON

To the Memory of

THE OFFICERS AND MEN

OF

THE GLASGOW HIGHLANDERS (9TH H.L.I.)

WHO FELL 1917–1918

WHOM I WAS SENT TO TEACH, BUT WHO TAUGHT ME.

A TOKEN OF REMEMBRANCE AND GRATITUDE

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." —JOHN xii. 24.

THAT is to say there is a waste, a patent obvious stupid waste, that is no waste; a grievous loss that is no loss, but glorious gain. Watch that sower yonder trudging up and down the furrows. What he has in his basket there is seed, the very food that multitudes require; and with both unresting, tireless hands the fool is throwing it away! The man is mad, and should be stopped! But, let the weeks and months slip past, and his silly-looking prodigality will be proved deeper wisdom than our cheap surface cleverness. The whole land will lie golden to the harvest; the groaning carts, piled high as they can hold, go creaking home; the stackyards fill to overflowing. Some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred fold, what he threw

away so daftly will return to him with an enormous interest accrued. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." That is the law of life, of every life from the lowest to the highest, up to and including God's. And, says Christ, looking hard at ours, there are no exceptions. Use yours on selfishness and your own ends and comforts, nothing more, and it will mould and rot. Toss it away in some generous fashion for God and your fellows, and only so can it come home to you, how full and rich and interesting life can be. As Laotze put it long ago, "The highest goodness is like water. For water blesses all things by ever seeking for itself the lowest place, which men abhor."

But is there not another thought here, namely this, that cruel and blind and senseless though God's ordering of things may often look, it too is far wiser than we, with our cramped horizons and our shortsighted peering eyes, can see? Here also a great Sower goes forth to sow; and His seed is these wonderful human lives of ours, each one of them unique and irreplacable. And He scatters them so carelessly, it seems; wastes and squanders them so senselessly. Some fall on stony ground where they have never a chance; or on a hard beaten path, and the birds, poising for a moment upon level wings, bank down on them, and they are gone; or where the weeds and cares of life spring up and choke them; or where herding anxieties and crowding thrusting worries churn life with their trampling feet into a muddy bog where no green thing can grow; or where, broken across at once, it lies crushed and withering. He fashions a marvellous brain; but, caught in the net of an imperfect social system, it gains no opportunity, and nothing comes of it. He thinks out a creature made for affection and service, and no particular love enters her life, and all her possibilities are starved and thrown away. He makes young things—clean, joyous, winsome—and then there comes an accident, a germ, a puff of foul air, a war, and they are gone; and there

is left only an emptiness, an ache, a memory, a glorious might-have-been that now can never be! And the sore heart, baffled and perplexed, keeps crying, Why?

There is no use pretending that such dark facts do not confront us, obvious and staring; and it is cowardly to keep looking resolutely the other way to avoid seeing what we don't want to see. In Emerson's household it was an unwritten law that he, living in that little earthly paradise of his, must not be told of any ugly fact out in the rough world. For that might disturb him, might throw a shadow on his cheerfulness. However breezy it may sound, however heartily it slaps us on the back, an optimism built up upon such dishonesty has no practical value for real men, living a real life, in the real world; a world not as he chose to dream of it, but as it is. A picture that has no shadows in it is not true to nature; and any reading of life that does not frankly admit that there are awe on awe, and fearsomeness, and mystery, and a gross darkness which falls cold and shivery here and there, and in which we can only feel our way blindly with groping hands, is an irritating fiction, nothing more.

That is what goes far to explain the power and the appeal of the New Testament—that it never pretends, and never passes by upon the other side, with eyes carefully averted from such sinister and vulgar and upsetting facts as blood, and groans, and robbers, and desperately wounded men left penniless and stranded; that it comes out of the real world; that in its pages we find ourselves in the familiar setting of actual life; for in it there is an immensity of sorrow, and pain, and grief, and breaking hearts, and desperate folk (watch how, wherever Christ appears, the roads that lead to Him are blocked with needy people streaming towards Him), and that it is against that sombre background that it paints its glorious assurance of God's love, and Christ's sufficiency, and the essential happiness and splendour of this life of ours, if we will live it as it should be lived, and will accept the help of Christ which can enable us to do it: that even so,

it admits frankly that, for the moment, there remain things dark and ominous and difficult to understand; that we are characters lost in the centre of a story where things look tangled and sometimes inextricable, yet also that there is a mind thinking it out that is not lost, but that is guiding us all surely towards some magnificent end; that "afterwards," when we reach the last chapter, we shall look back bewildered that we failed to understand what will have grown so obvious to us then; and that, meantime, we are not left to stumble in sheer darkness, but are given hints, and truths, that may not shine out quite to the end of the blackness, but which do give us a wide circle of light about us, and do show our way quite clearly. And, among them, surely not the least is this—there is a loss, a stupid patent obvious loss, that is no loss; a waste that is not waste, but glorious gain.

The outstanding instance of that is, of course, the Cross of Christ. What a sheer bungle that seemed! What a gross mishandling of the one chance of the world! The Greeks heard of it with a loud guffaw of noisy laughter; it seemed to them the maddest and most crack-brained tale that man had ever dreamed. While the Jews shrank from it with shuddering; for in their eyes one hanged upon a tree was a thing accursed of God. So their law said. And in one place we are told that it was the Jewish authorities who demanded that the body of Jesus should be taken down and hidden out of sight. It was their sacred season, and they could not worship God, they said, could not expect His Presence, with this pollution staring at Him in their midst. "Away with it," they urged, quite hot about it, "and let our needy souls have some chance of being blessed!"

God had Jesus Christ; and that was what He did with Him! What a colossal, inexcusable waste! Here was that wonderful heart on fire to save the world. You and I would have said, with assurance, that He must be given time—long time; that the ordinary span of human life must

be stretched to the cracking. How else could He possibly even begin to see His vast task through! You and I would have taken it for granted that He would be set in some position of authority and dignity, where His influence would tell on multitudes, His least wish be carried out with anxious care, wide through the listening deferential world, that huge power would be heaped on Him, every conceivable opportunity be given Him, that the Roman purple, or the like, would fall to Him by Divine right. And, in reality, God let Him grow up entirely unnoticed in some alley of a dull little provincial town; squandered that life, or most of it, on the petty bits of business of a country trader's little workshop! Had you asked where to find Him, they would have pointed you up some back street. "Go along there till you come to a carpenter's shed. Oh yes, quite a little place! He will either be there or in the cottage next it." He was given eighteen months, some say, in which to teach the world, and these in a forgotten corner of it; and then God allowed them to hustle Him, He being only thirty-three, to a horrible, ignominious, ugly death, with nothing, it seemed, done. He had Christ, the wonderful Christ, and He did that with Him! The waste of it, the unbelievable and cruel waste of our one chance, that never could return!

Ah, but, says Paul, in a phrase so bold that it takes away the breath and leaves us staring at him, "The foolishness of God—what you so loftily regret as imbecility—is wiser than men!" And he looks pityingly at our poor little clevernesses and so confident wisdoms. In one sense, it was a sordid story of plotting evil and triumphant malice. Yet, as Paul watched Christ's enemies strutting to and fro, rubbing their hands with satisfaction, telling each other complacently, as they came down Calvary, "Well! that's an end of that," with self-contented waggings of the head, almost, it seems, a smile forms in his eyes. "And when," he quotes, "they had fulfilled all that the prophets spake of Him." When they fulfilled! He was not baffled then, not thwarted, not

defeated! But they had given Him the very chance that He required; their hands had flung wide for Him the door He needed opened; their seeming triumph led straight on to His. And that is literally true. Explain it how you will, the fact remains that if Jesus Christ had lived to be an old man, filling His crowded years with all manner of wisdom and of generous kindness, and had died in His bed at last, He would not have had anything like the unforgettable appeal which, as things are, He has made to the world. It is the Cross that grips, that haunts, that lays compulsion on us. Little wonder it was taken as the Christian symbol; that Constantine wove it into his banners, that the Crusaders painted it upon their shields, that in every Church, in all great art, in literature, in the record of the deepest secrets of men's lives the whole world over, always we come on it, always its solemn shadow falls across us. In the gospel of Peter we are told that a cry rang from the Cross itself: a queer, crude tale. And yet who among us has not heard that cry? All the ages down it has reverberated through men's hearts, and who so hears it has to stop short, has to listen, cannot but feel, he, too, the old emotion, the old thrill, the old unanswerable claim, which to deny is infamy, and to forget is sin. It is on Calvary Christ masters us; it is beside that thing of shame that somehow we know God is love; and that forgiveness, our forgiveness, grows for us a blessed and most certain fact, on which we can rely; it is when that grim hangman's gibbet rises before us that Christ is irresistible, and we have to surrender. So certain is it that there is a waste that is not waste; a stupid, obvious, clumsy loss that is no loss, but glorious gain.

That is a truth that has a wide application. This, for example, is Remembrance Day; and for many there is a renewal of the old stabbing soreness, the old stunned, questioning sense of the sheer folly of it all. They know it had to be, but why? It seems so silly, such a grotesque prodigality! They were so young! Miss Tynan, you re-

member, pictured heaven, to which, as a rule, it is the old and tired that win, suddenly stormed by crowds of laughing, cheery youngsters, troops of them in every street. They were so very young! Their lives had hardly started when these were snatched away from them again, and all they were to be went out, like a light suddenly extinguished. They were so fascinating; and their going left the world a barer place! We had our dreams and hopes for them, and had a right to have them. We thought of them as by and by growing up to full manhood—long before this it would have been—as more and more taking our places; till we, increasingly slipping out of things, were to withdraw at last, leaving these in their safe keeping with an easy mind. And they are gone. And all they could, and would, and surely should have been is thrown away!

I, too, have felt that bitterly—standing among the ghastly wreckage of a battlefield, have cried out vehemently with a hot heart, like the disciple, "Why this insane waste, this squandering of that with which so much might have been done?" But it was Judas, you remember, who argued in that fashion; and he was not the wisest of the Twelve. And sometimes I have looked at them with a great awe, and almost envy, in my heart. Death had come very close. Some had been taken, some were left. And it was very gratefully, and yet somewhat abashed, that one picked up his life again. It was as if a hand had pushed me back, No! no! not you; you go and guard the stuff. "But you," was said to a mere laughing laddie at one's side, "you will do, yes, and you, and you." And they were called to some high service, beside which anything we can do here seems trivial, and a mere footnote in small print. As Moulton put it, thinking about his own dead boy, and only a few weeks before he himself, a prince of scholars with a great work still before him, died in an open boat after his vessel was torpedoed, "If our earthly life is only a testing and a training, we need not wonder why there are so many 'premature' withdrawals of bright

and promising lives. God does not need the time we need to test a character, nor does He take our view of the importance of a post to which He has set us. Only He can know whether service here, or service yonder, is better for any individual, or for the supreme interests of the Kingdom."

After all, our hope for them, what was it ? That gradually they would take their place in life, would settle down at length in a home of their own, would carry through the little daily duties in the office or elsewhere, would fill in their leisure with the usual ploys and pleasures, would be kindly and true and useful men ; that, by and by, they would grow old, and their interests become increasingly circumscribed, that their steps would shorten, and their daily walks draw in, that in fact they would dodder through a clean but tame life down to an inconspicuous grave, and fall out, at last, with not much to show for things. Is that an unfair picture of the life-story of an ordinary man, of that of which our hearts cry out indignantly God has defrauded them ?

And what is it that He has gifted to them, and which poutingly we deride as a denial of their elementary rights ? They have become for ever a part of that splendour of the race that will thrill other generations till the end of time ; they are the glorious tradition that always will be proudly handed down, and to keep which unsullied will be our chief ambition as a people ; they are the tale that will be told in every nursery to each new age of youngsters, and every time these new hearts also will catch fire, and these new eyes, too, light, as, taught by this, they also take it in how brave and chivalrous a thing a life like that given to them can be, how valorously it can be used : they are part of the conscience of our people. For always in times of crisis the young then will feel these eyes upon them, following them, hopefully, expectantly, confidently ; and in their turn they, too, will have to play the man, will not dare to be false—not they, who come of such a breed !

Orion and Cepheus and Cassiopeia were just ordinary

people once. But they set them in the heavens, called the constellations after them. And now, half the world over, troubled spirits and tried desperate souls look up at their clear shining, and grow calm and brave and resolute again. And these lads are now part of the constellations that, whenever the dark gathers and whenever the night falls, will always flame out in our northern skies. So long as we remain a people, all the ages down, men will look up at them and draw new courage and fresh inspiration from them.

> "In our halls is hung
> Armoury of the invincible knights of old:
> We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
> That Shakespeare spake: the faith and morals hold
> Which Milton held.—In everything we are sprung
> From earth's first blood, have titles manifold."

Your laddie's arms hang there! And, down the generations, other boys will steal out softly when alone and stand a long time looking up at them, with their hearts feeling the old thrill, and dreaming the old dreams, and stung to the old pride; till they, too, will be ready for the crisis and the sacrifices of their day, ready to give all, do all, throw away life itself, upon the generous adventure to which their times will call them.

> "O may I join the choir invisible
> Of those immortal dead who live again
> In minds made better by their presence: live
> In pulses stirred to generosity,
> In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
> For miserable aims that end with self,
> In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
> And with their mild persistence urge man's search
> To vaster issues.
> May I reach
> That purest heaven, be to other souls
> The cup of strength in some great agony,
> Enkindle generous ardour, feed pure love.
> So shall I join the choir invisible
> Whose music is the gladness of the world."

For them that prayer is answered.

Wasted them! Wasted them! What foolish talk is this? What bigger thing could God have done with them? Is it to live to add to dull years—duller years? Is it to live to work out one's own interests and heap up one's own comforts and spend the whole tale of it on one's own ends? Face to face with Jesus Christ, dare we take these things as our standard and our furthest goals?

At the Front, you were not permitted to put anything on the bare crosses but the name, the rank, the date, and the battalion. Yet, upon almost all those I set up (and, ah, how many they were!), we added this one further line, John xv. and 13. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends": to that, which Jesus called the greatest, they attained; and what we dreamed for them, how dull and dim and tashed it looks beside it!

During the war a father came to tell me of his laddie's death. His face was white, but his head was carried proudly, and there was a light shining in his eyes. And all he said was this: "I had great dreams and ambitions for my boy. I was perhaps too proud of him. But I had never hoped for anything as big as this!" There is a loss that is no loss; there is a stupid, obvious, demonstrable waste that is not waste, but glorious gain.

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." You notice that splendid assumption, that brave faith of Christ in you and me, a trust so bold yet so entirely characteristic of Him, which, indeed, helped Him to face His own Cross unafraid. He is quite sure that chivalry, unselfishness, self-sacrifice, will always prove infectious: that hearts, such as yours and mine, cannot see a greater, and rest satisfied with what is lower; cannot know a better, and not be constrained to emulate it. If the corn of wheat remains alone, it fails, and its sowing was quite useless, and there was palpable waste indeed. Ah, but it won't, said Christ, it won't! Like begets like, the corn of wheat dies, but produces

others, many others, ready to carry on the same unselfishness. You see the point! If Christ and His work and His sacrifice do not result in Christlikeness in you and me, then for us it is quite valueless, and has entirely failed; and, in so far as you and I are concerned, Christ was thrown away in vain.

How, then, is it with you and me? Be very sure that upon Calvary it was no strange, immoral favouritism that came into operation, whereby because of some beliefs that remain mere dead letters, that produce no change whatever in their characters, some people living the same kind of life as others, and following the same selfish interests and ends as they, are given a destiny entirely different. That is the vainest of vain dreams. Rather is this the supreme revelation of a new way of living life; and only those who, blunderingly it may be, yet honestly, seek to adopt and imitate it can be counted really Christian folk. We thus judge, says Paul, that if He died for us, then our lives also must be thrown away for other people. And he speaks confidently as if a thing quite new in the world had suddenly appeared, as if his day had seen the evolution of a quite new creature, with quite other interests and standards and desires and ends than ordinary men, a thing recognizably different from the folk about it almost at a first glance, that put its life to other and far nobler uses, lived in a new way—Christ's way. We, he says boldly, have the mind of Christ, and live after His plan. I wonder is it really so with you and me; if in us there is any greenness of the growing blade, and any increasing sympathy with Jesus' way of life, and any approximating of our character to His? If not, the corn of wheat has died, and still remains alone; and the Cross is for us an empty thing; and, although God so loved the world as to give up His Son for it, in our case it has been for absolutely nothing. That were a loss that is a loss indeed, and a waste terrible to contemplate!

And so in measure it is with these others. This is Remembrance Day. But the only real, the only fitting, the one worthy remembrance of them is that we go and do like-

wise in the tiny scale of things that falls to us, that we face what we have to face, that we bear what we have to bear, that we do what we have to do, that we live our life also in their gallant and self-sacrificing fashion, proving we have really learned from them, and are a bigger breed because ennobled by this standard they have set us, and below which we dare not fall.

Browning was once sailing the Spanish seas, and as St. Vincent, Cadiz, and Gibraltar, one after the other, came in view, each with the gallant memories of those who dared and died for us in other days, they sent him to his knees, he said, in humbled prayer and praise; and there he vowed that, please God, he, too, would do something in his day for England, that he might not be quite unworthy of the glories and the sacrifices of the past. And unless this is a goad, an inspiration, a compulsion to us to put on the same cheerful unselfishness in the living of our life, and the facing of our problems, and the thinking out of the difficulties of our time, has it not largely failed? The one effective remembrance is to catch their spirit, and in our thought, our home life, our business, our politics, our handling of our social questions, to hand on the blazing torch they, falling, threw to us.

Yet is there any very manifest sign of that? We are struggling to make war impossible, as men have often done before us. And this time, it may be, that God in His goodness may enable us to see the way to render that as obsolete as duelling. But is not our real problem not merely to eliminate war with its horrors, but even more to find some way to preserve its glories, some other method, as effective for the masses of men, to call out and utilize for other ends that marvellous gallantry, that cheery self-sacrifice, that new bigness of nature which war creates in most of us, till ordinary mortals become heroes daily doing deeds that make our hearts laugh aloud with pride, flinging away their lives with a princely carelessness of liberality as if these were the merest nothings, which as a rule they do not show elsewhere.

That is the spirit that we always need ; and it was shown to us by our own boys in our own time ; and yet we have not learned it. Look out across the world. With the rich so ostentatiously flaunting their possessions in the faces of men out of work, and sick at heart, and well-nigh desperate, with our ears filled day by day with a vulgar brawl of clashing interests, with every trade thinking of its own little gains, with capital and labour, those natural allies, pulling vehemently at opposite ends of the rope, wasting their energies in a continual internecine selfishness, where is there anywhere a trace of the spirit of the boys who volunteered for us, of the laughing sacrifice of the trenches, of the chivalry that forgot self in the attempt to further larger interests ? Have we learned nothing from it all ? Has the loss been a loss indeed, and the waste utter waste ? Has the corn of wheat, although it died, remained alone and brought forth no harvest in our lives ?

Buddha declared that when the soul appears before the judgment-seat of Yama, it is asked searchingly, " But did you not see the messengers I sent to warn you—an old man, an ill man, a corpse, those three telling proofs that the world and its gifts are fleeting nothings, and that your mind should concentrate on something worthier ? You did ; and, seeing, took no notice. Then your blood be upon your own stubborn head ! " And we have had so many messengers sent to us in our day ! Millions of boys have let us see how life ought really to be used ! And are they, our own lads, to be the final witnesses against us, who will make our selfishness look unforgiveable ?

Stevenson came of an engineering family who had for generations built lighthouses around the coast. Wherever there are treacherous currents, and cruel rocks where vessels are apt to be hurled to doom amid that white snarling rage of swirling foam, there their work stands to guide the seaman and to keep him safe. And sometimes as he thought of what his forefathers had done, of all the men that they had helped,

of all the lives that they had saved, of all the family circles they had kept unbroken, a hot contempt for his own mode of life swept over him, a passionate feeling that he, too, in his own way, must be true to his traditions, and help others round about him.

> "This hast thou done, and I—can I be base?
> I must arise, O Father, and to port
> Some lost, complaining seaman pilot home."

What is the value of a passing gush of feeling, and some cheap emotion? If we would really remember them, then let us catch their spirit and live our lives in their big generous manner, proving that it has made a difference, and that because they died for us we are a nobler people with a better understanding how life should be spent, and with more Christ-like, because more unselfish, ways.

So shall the bitter loss be no loss; and the waste, the cruel, obvious, hideous waste, be not waste, but a glorious gain.

XIII

ON THE NEED OF COMMUNION WITH GOD

"And He withdrew Himself into the wilderness, and prayed."—LUKE v. 16.

IN one respect Luke carries us a step farther than do the other three evangelists. His was a mind that, not content with facts, wanted to get behind them to their causes. Here was the wonder of the character of Christ, that exquisite thing He wove out of the joys, the chances, the disasters, of a human life which we are apt to tangle and knot hard into a mere soiled bungle. How was it done? That was what Luke was bent upon discovering, if he could. Like one of those erratic blocks entirely different from every other rock in a whole countryside that so puzzle the geologists, must this tremendous fact remain for ever an inexplicable mystery, amazingly beautiful, but as far from us as the stars? Or, peering behind it, might one grow to see how the woof and the web of it were laid together with such cunning skill, and so begin at least to learn to imitate it in a blundering kind of way? And, making diligent inquiry, as he says he did, from every one likely to know, he became more and more sure of this, and repeatedly sets it down for us, that the secret of it all lies here, in the closeness and the naturalness of our Lord's communion with God.

It grows very striking, once you notice it, how often, with Luke as guide, we come on Christ upon His knees, so rapt in prayer that we do not interrupt Him, though we back

out with a hot-faced feeling of intrusion : how plain it becomes, as we read on, that by a law of gravity of its own, His spirit swung back, upon every opportunity, to God as to its natural resting-place and home ; how, while we give our leisure to many things—hobbies and games and various interests—Christ eagerly used such times for fellowship with God, choosing to do that with them, because He really loved God, and being with God, better than anything else by far in the whole world, and ran to Him at every chance, though it were only for a second ; how, like a sailor, glad to be done with the narrow, choking lanes and crowding houses, and to have God's clean winds filling his lungs again, so Christ joyously betook Himself back to His own element, as naturally as a tired man's steps turn home.

In the Hebrides you are never far from the sea. Travel inland, and it thrusts arms after you. At every turning of the roads you can catch glimpses of its greyness or its glitter. Always its tang and the roaring of its breakers fill one's nostrils and one's ears. And it has soaked into the people's very soul, so that in all their music one can hear the sobbing, and the cluck, and the gurgling ripple of great waters. And as we read Christ's life the sense of God's presence very near is always strong upon us, permeating everything, as these islands lie bathed, day in and day out, in the scents and sounds and mysteries of the sea.

That is a fact worth pondering gravely. For ours is a type of religion from which, to a very large extent, all that has died away. Spiritually, as elsewhere, we are hot and almost desperately active, keep fussing rather noisily in a ceaseless energy of hard-breathing activities. But even many Church folk seem to feel no clamant need for worship, for slipping out of the press of things to catch a clear uninterrupted view of God, for escaping from the roar and rumble of the constant traffic of our life into a quiet place where we can hear Him speaking to our souls. They turn in to a service when there is nothing else to do, when it is

not fine enough for a run, nor too wet to come out at all, when they have not had a full Saturday that leaves them inclined for a lazy loafing day to make them ready for the fulness of the coming Monday, or when they can manage to fit it in to their other planning of their Sunday. But they feel no acute longing for God, no hunger of soul for Him, like that other hunger of the body which they must meet and answer several times a day.

Prayer has a very small place in our life. How much of your average day do you give to God, spending it definitely with Him? Be honest with yourself—how much? Barrie tells us that there were times when his mother's door was locked, and they stole through the house, knowing that she was on her knees; and that, for the moment, the worn, furrowed face was the face of a little child. But we are of the order of Martha, good, boisterous soul, bluster through life, are ill at ease when inactive, and fidgety in times of quiet. And we look rather askance at Mary, as at one surely too unlike and anæmic and not fully human, one of those delicate and always interesting-looking creatures who drift through life with unsoiled hands, but surely rather fecklessly; and we wonder at Christ's preference for her. The good Samaritan! Now there is a man whose religion appeals to us, and which we understand. But as for that publican in the temple who so moved our Lord—ah well! that is not our line of things; and in that whole region we feel gawky and awkward and out of our element.

For the fact is that we don't believe in prayer, except officially, at least not much. Stevenson tells us that he stood glowering at the monks in the quietness of their retreat with a hot anger in his heart against such miserable skulkers, as he felt they were. Come out of that, his heart cried to them scornfully, and do a man's part towards keeping this great earth of ours spinning round and round! For the life of prayer looked to him a sheer waste of time, an obvious fatuity. And we, too, don't greatly believe in it. Ah well!

we say, with a resigned sigh, we must just pray about it. So long as we ourselves are running about and doing things, can get our own hands on the business, we have some real hope. But when we are fairly beaten back on God and this futile affair, things, we feel, have indeed grown desperate, and we are almost at our tether's end. We do it, but often it is little more than a concession to the proprieties of things, or that we may be able to tell ourselves later that we tried everything—yes, even this. We don't really believe in it, don't feel the need of it, don't like it, are not going to do it—much.

Yet Christ came through, says Luke, only by reason of His constant, eager fellowship with God ; and we shall hardly manage otherwise. Indeed all the saints stare at us in sheer bewilderment. " What is it that you think you are supposed to be doing ? " they demand. You might perhaps breathe without air, swim without water, talk without sounds, but never by any possibility will you make anything of your spiritual life without close and constant communion with God. Set that down, so they tell us, as a first axiom and an unalterable law.

And, for His part, Christ assumes that, of course, we ourselves will want that, be unable, indeed, to keep away. For to Him religion is not a theory, but an affection. It means loving God. " Of dogma," says Morley of Cromwell, " he rarely speaks. Religion to him is not dogma, but communion with a being apart from dogma." " Seek the Lord and His face continually," he writes to his son : " let this be the business of your life and strength, and let all things be subservient and in order to this." And, indeed, that is a queer friendship, surely, that never wishes to see the Friend, can't be bothered going to Him, feels rather bored while we are with Him, and puts in a dull time until we can with decency slip away with that bit of the day's drudgery, thank God, safely over ! Al Ghazzali looks us squarely in the eyes. " If you are never alone with God," he says, " it is not because you are too busy ; it is because you don't care for Him, don't

like Him. And you had better face the facts." For heaven is an eternal fellowship with Him and happy service of Him. And if you don't want that, no one will force you into it. "Without are dogs," says John. And if, to all the glories of the city, you prefer consorting with these mangy, prowling, ownerless, snapping curs, as they nose and scratch among the garbage heaps, nosing and scratching joyously among the rest, it is entirely for you to say. But, to his mind, it seems a puzzling choice.

It is impressive and arresting to note some of the things that kept sending Christ to God.

Very often, it was gratitude; He was always wanting to thank God for something, not seldom for things that would have soured us, and shattered our crazy faith to bits. Let us remember that, for there are folk who have no sunshine in their natures, who are always complaining about something. And they are very trying. But is it not so we are all apt to bear ourselves towards God? Our prayers are largely a hot protest, a desolate wail, an offended pointing out that for One who claims to be Love, it is on the face of it ridiculous to treat us as He is proposing, and we say firmly that it just won't do. There was no touch of that in Christ. A Scottish saint of other days who was devoted to his little lassie, learning that hope was out, and she must go, said to his wife, "We are not going merely to let her be taken from us as by force: we are going to give her as a free gift." And together they knelt down, and put their precious treasure back into God's arms again. Sometimes, when peevish and bad tempered towards God, that little scene has shamed and steadied me. Christ's faith was always of that valorous type. He did not submit. No. He gave thanks for Calvary, and for His chance of service there.

But often it was the fulness of life, His wonder over the daily mercies that we take for granted, some other little token, not little to Him, of the glory of God's kindness, that sent Him back to Him with a heart singing like a happy

child's. I have a sister long with God; and once, as a boy, I met her coming running up the stairs, and then she stopped short and looked foolish. "I am so happy, I was going to tell mother about it all," she said. But the mother had been dead for months. Christ, too, had that same instinct. Always He wanted to thank God for something, to tell Him how splendid is the life that He has planned for us, and how His kindness makes us love Him. And do you never feel like that? All the saints do. When they asked Dante what made him a religious man, he answered, "The being of the world, and my own being"; Christ's death for me, and the amazing hopes He sets before me. As if to say, what else could I possibly do except love God. Look round you at His gifts to us, how He keeps heaping up His loving-kindnesses upon us. Look at this glorious earth He has contrived for us, at this full life that He has thought out for us and put into our hands, at all that Christ brings to us day by day. Love Him? Of course. And what else could I do but love Him?

Surely you also must, at times at least, feel that! I once heard Dr. Coffin quoting with extraordinary aptness on this very point from Leslie Stephen. That fine soul was, of course, an agnostic. Yet when his wife died, writing to a friend, he said, "I thank"—and then he remembered he had nobody to thank, and so he left a blank, "I thank —— I have known her all these years." And can you read God's Word, and can you say, or rather sing, your creed, and can you pass through life, with every day piling its benefits upon you, and not wish to thank the Giver of it all?

You are shy and reserved, you say, have no great sense of sin, are not a religious person, so you feel. I know. Still, go to God just as you are, and tell Him all that, adding, "And yet I, too, cannot keep away, must come to Thee who art so good to me, and tell Thee it does touch me and does make me love One who has been and is so wonderfully good to me." For that, too, is a very real religion.

Within a fortnight of his death, when old and ill and very weary, Luther wrote a letter to his wife and signed it, "Martin Luther, your old lover." There wasn't much in it. Yet I think that she would cherish that one more than most. And if you come to praise God for your happiness and all the gladness that He has bestowed on you, with everybody else begging for this, and crying out for that, and not one of them satisfied, it seems, I think that He will like your poor prayer just as well as most.

And you could give Him that, now couldn't you? "If I were a nightingale," said Epictetus, "I could pour out my life in song to Him, but being just an old, lame man, what can I do but praise and bless Him as I can?" Religion or no, sense of sin or not, carry your gladness and your joy in life to God as a thankoffering. "It is a comely fashion to be glad. Joy is the grace we say to God" over His heaped-up benefits. And Lamb, as you remember, could not understand why we should limit that seemly rite to times of food alone, wanted to say graces over books, and half a hundred other glories every hour. And Jesus did that, could not keep from breaking away to God with a swift word of thanks for this, and this, and this, that we accept dully and churlishly as our mere due, as much less, so we often tell Him sullenly, than our bare rights. Thanksgiving is the language of heaven, and we had better start to learn it if we are not to be mere dumb aliens there.

Further, Jesus kept within sight of God, because He found life difficult to live aright, yes, even He, and wanted to have certainty. That, too, we had better remember. For the very perfection of Christ's triumph is apt to blind us to its wonder. Reynolds held that a masterpiece is not wholly a masterpiece unless it gives the impression that it was done easily. Our Lord does not fail there. Always it is so sure, so unhesitating, so inevitable, that we forget that it was neither automatic nor instinctive, but that He also had to

choose every time, and every time chose rightly. How did He manage that ? Life must be lived so quickly : it won't wait for long consideration, and flurried and flustered, in our hurry, we go wrong. Was that the turning, Rossetti asks in one of his poems, that little insignificant lane that I brushed past ? I thought that it would have been plain and obvious, a great, wide, staring, beaten track that nobody could overlook ! And so he missed it, as we often do. Or, we stand puzzled at the crossroads, looking up and looking down, with never a notion how to go, or to which hand to turn ; end, like as not, by taking some path at haphazard, or because it looks pleasant and soft and green, and often find ourselves led into bogs and heavy going. How did Christ always see His way so clearly with so sure and so infallible a sense ?

Luke answers that. For, before every crisis of His life, he lets us see Christ on His knees consulting God ; and then He rises, and comes forth, His mind made up, unflustered, perfect master of the situation, let what may befall. Do we do that ? Do we consult God first, or more than officially at any time ? We think of our own wishes, and those of the family ; we map out what it means in loss or gain in our own comfort, or in our prospects, or in our material things. But when we go to God about it, is it to do more than tell Him what we have decided ; or to consult Him, as most people do when they ask others for advice, not really wanting their opinion, but rather wishing them to corroborate what they themselves desire ? We are promised a voice of guidance saying to us, " This is the way, walk ye in it." But if we never listen for it, will not heed it, shut our ears against it, unless it runs parallel with our own fancies, what can it do on our behalf ? Is our first thought, as it was Christ's, in everything as it arises to discover what is the will of God for me concerning this ? What would He have me do ? By what course would I serve Him best ? Here am I ready and willing to be used as He determines, if only He will let me

see what His will for me is. Cleanthes of old used a wise prayer :

> "Lead me, O God, and Thou, O Fate,
> Thine appointment I await.
> Only lead me. I will go
> With no flagging steps, nor slow;
> Or if I degenerate be,
> And consent reluctantly,
> Still, God, I do follow Thee."

Unless you keep feeling for God's hand, and listening for His voice at every turn, says Christ, believe Me, you will make a sorry mess of life ! And He Himself did every day what He keeps urging upon us.

Once more, Christ felt the rush of things was tiring for the soul, that to keep healthy we must make time now and then, though it be only for a moment between duties, to get a breath of pure air from the hills of God. His was the busiest of lives, and there was nothing about Him of that spiritual selfishness which many people mistake for religion. At Nazareth it was James who had long periods of prayer, and fasts, and all the recognized performances of saintly folk. For His part, Jesus had to toil with all His might and for long hours in the workshop to put bread and butter into the bairns' mouths, had to a large extent to fall back upon that brave assertion of the Apocrypha that the handiwork of the craftsman is his prayer, the thoroughness and honesty with which he does the ordinary tasks of common life. "In making shoes, and because he makes them, a man can gain heaven," says Unamuno, "provided that the shoemaker strives to be perfect as a shoemaker, as our Father in heaven is perfect." And later, as often as Christ planned to slip off for an hour or two out of the hot pressure of the crowds, some other anxious claimant was sure to burst in with some petition which Christ never turned away. "And He received them," we read of one such intrusion breaking in on the leisure He had felt that He must have if He was to keep on,

"and spake to them of the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing."

Easy for Him, we say, for where Christ was God was; and to get to God the surest and the quickest way is to get close to Christ, yes, even if you have to shove and fight your way to Him to the heart of a crowd. And that is true. And you and I must learn Christ's art of consecrating ordinary duties, of rubbing out that heavy line we draw between things sacred and the merely secular, by carrying our religion into these last too—must do so, if in our case the thing is to work out at all; since, willy-nilly, it is among these that our days must be spent; and there, if anywhere, that we must meet with God. For there it is nine-tenths and more of our whole waking life is lived, in the hubbub and crying of the nursery, or down in the office among things frankly, even crudely, material, or coaxing the same elements, year in, year out, into a long procession of unwilling scholars whose eyes keep straying to the clock, and whose bored minds have little appetite for anything, except for Saturday and its football joys. Well, Brother Lawrence came to this of it, he said, that he felt himself as surely in God's presence in his noisy kitchen, with half a dozen voices shouting at him at once for half a dozen things, as at the Sacrament. And Chalmers, declares Rosebery, might be immersed in preaching, speaking, organizing, might have to push now here, and now there, "with the dust and fire of the world upon his clothes," but "always he carried his shrine with him." That is the end of religion, the whole point of the thing.

Yet, says Christ, if you live always in the glare of life, that to a certainty means sunstroke; if you spend all your days in the hot, steamy plains, that must end in a fever in your soul. Somehow or other you must cut little clearings in that jungle in which you are lost, and so catch glimpses of the stars to guide you. If, now and then, you can escape out of it for a breathing space and be alone with God, so much the better. But if not,

then remember that prayer is not asking for things (that is only its lowest form), it is the art of making a friend of God, of turning to Him when we can, to seek His counsel, or to give thanks, or to talk matters over with Him, or for no definite reason except this that we love to be with Him. And as you walk the streets, between one duty as you lay it down, and the next as you turn to it, however rushed or hurried you may be, you can do that, yes, and would do it, if you really loved Him.

Two poetesses of our day have given us apt illustrations —one, Miss Underhill, picturing a society lady, moving about her duties with a perfect grace, absorbed in them, and carrying them through with all her heart, and yet her soul is like a bird which, giving itself steadfastly to its maternal little duties, dreams of the rapture and the glory of the flight that it has known, till, as it sleeps, it twitters, and its wings keep half unfolding of themselves from very longing; the other, Mrs. Meynell, telling of a woman who, throughout the day, may not think of the lover who is not for her, and rigorously turns her thoughts away to the dull little nothings that make up her life, but, when her will is laid aside at night with her doffed garments, in her first dream, "I run, I run, I am gathered to thine arms."

So, busy and bustled though you be, and dwelling in the world as you must do, somehow you must make room in your life for God; and if your heart is His, it will contrive it somehow—must do it. For as the pearls of the House of Austria, when they grew dim and tarnished, could renew their glory only by being sunk deep in their native element again, so your soul also will grow tashed and dulled and faded, unless day by day—yes, many times a day—you sink it also deep in God.

But, in particular, there are two places in life where Christ's example warns us tellingly that we must let nothing come between us and our Father. Always when success, as men judge, came to the Master, He never failed to clutch swiftly at God's hand to steady Him. It was not success in His

view at all, that noisy enthusiasm that did not understand, that shout that would have lured Him from His own high purposes to stoop to be a king. But face to face with popularity and triumph, our Lord always felt that He stood upon slippery places, must keep near to God. Shakespeare knew that, and tells us it was in the day of his success that these foul alien thoughts looked in at the window of Macbeth's mind, and, pushing the door, found it open and came in, to make what hideous ruin of a stately soul! "They met me in the day of my success." Christ, too, feels that is apt to be the case. Among their comforts, and interests, and crowding happinesses, can people, He asks, keep their souls alive, or fail to become flabbily soft and self-indulgent? If things are going well with you, if your fond dreams are coming true, if life is all a triumph, look at Christ's eyes, and at the terror in them as He watches you, and give heed to that cry of His uttered so agonizingly, "Closer to God! For your life's sake, closer to God!" For you are on the very spot, where most souls that make shipwreck have gone down, and left only some tragic flotsam tossing on these sunlit waters.

Or, if your life has broken, and has cruelly, it seems, denied you what you had the right to expect, Christ, too, knows what it means to fail. He also saw plans snap, and dreams go out; He also watched His mission come to nothing, and the people whom He longed to win make up their minds they would have none of Him. And He remembers what a testing-time that is; how some become cynical about their fellows, and others toss away their faith in God as a proved cheat, or, dropping their last remnants of nobility, grow frankly selfish, if not merely earthy. "In every age," says Morley grimly, turning the pages of his vast knowledge of life, "cases meet us where experience changes the idealist and the reformer first to doubter, then to indifferent, next to pure egoist, at last to hard cynic. The process may be gradual, but it is apt to be implacable. And the fallen man

one day awakes to find his sensibility gone, his moral pulse at a stand, and a once ardent soul burnt down to ashes. When the waking hour arrives, one man may still have grace enough to go out and weep bitterly, another only mocks."

But face to face with failure, Christ came through it with a glorious courage and serenity, because at such dark hours always He fell back on God ; and, feeling Him there, went on unafraid.

That is a very moving incident that the Fourth Evangelist slips in between the two volumes of his life of Christ. The teaching days are over. They have not won the people. And, before entering on the story of the end, he tells us how Christ took it, what He did when He knew He had failed. "He went away beyond Jordan, into the place where John at first baptized, and there He abode," back to the hallowed spot where He had dreamed the big dreams that had come to nothing, and where He had received from John that last corroboration that had made Him certain of His mission, where God Himself, He felt, had called Him to this task for which, in spite of all the thoroughness with which He had carried it out, there was so little to show, back to one of the most sacred of places in all the world for Him, where He would be closest to God. We also have such hallowed corners in our memory. All his days, Ralph Erskine's soul fell back in troublous times when things went ill upon a holiday he had once spent in his youth at Portmoak, when again and again God grew so near and real and obvious, that he could almost see and hear Him, "yonder at the hillside, and yonder on the top of the mountain, and yonder in the east room, and yonder in the west room, and yonder in the low room, when He made my heart to go after Him." We, too, have had great seasons when He made our hearts go after Him, called us, flashed glorious possibilities before us, and we knew then it was all true, rose up, resolved to do it, and to put our life to these high purposes. And this is all there is

to show! Don't lose heart or break down, don't fling away your dreams as proved impossibilities, don't become soured and beaten. Get back to God, get nearer Him, that is your only chance now, if you are to meet it honourably.

No doubt when we, grown old and tired, climb back to our hillsides and mountain-tops where long ago the splendour of our visions made the common sky a glory for a time, it is like Moses upon Pisgah, very conscious of our failures, seeing clearly now how just a little more faith here, or thoroughness there, would have made all the difference, and given us what now can never be. There were no such accusing memories or regrets for Christ. He knew He had lived out His life, had fulfilled God's demands, that He had finished the work that had been given Him to do. But would not that very fact make faith more difficult for Him, and God's way with Him doubly hard to understand. We can explain our failure—know that it was our own fault. But He? Yet humbly, uncomplainingly He fell back upon God. Everything had gone wrong, as we would judge. The healing of their sufferers they had abused, losing sight of His main aim in what to Him was merely secondary; His teaching had not changed them as He hoped, it had all come to desperately little. Yet He did not fling out of the whole business, sick of a people that would not take His help; but He went back to God. And will you die for Me? God asked Him there in the old hallowed spot; suppose it can be only that way, will you dare to give Me that—a Cross? And Christ, made sure there in that secret place that was the road, came forth and trod it in a splendid calm. It was the way that He faced failure that has stormed and saved the world.

If life has not given you all you think that you can justly claim, don't throw away your hopes—get back to God. And if He tells you, too, that if you will accept a way more shadowed than you wish, and with less sunshine on it than your heart would choose, a smaller place than you feel you

deserve, if you will do that poor and petty thing that He has put within your reach, and which you sometimes feel makes no adequate use of you, do it with thoroughness and eagerness and faith, through you, too, somehow He will work a bigger thing than you can see or credit. Trust Him, and go to what He asks from you. For is there not the Cross to prove all that He says?

What would you say here among the old memories of the big dreams of long ago to, like Christ, dedicating ourselves once again to God?

"Lord, if I have done iniquity," wrote Ebenezer Erskine on the night that changed all life for him, "I am resolved to do it no more. I offer myself unto Christ, the Lord, as an object proper for all His offices to be exercised upon. I take a whole Christ, with all His laws, and all His crosses and afflictions. I except against none of them. I will live for Him, I will die for Him. Only Thou must fulfil both Thy own part and my part of the covenant: for this is the tenor of Thy covenant, 'I will put My spirit within them, and cause them to walk in My statutes: I will never, never, never leave thee nor forsake thee.' Lord, upon these terms I renew my covenant this night; and I take heaven and earth, men and angels, sun, moon, and stars, the stones and timbers of this house to witness, that, upon these terms, I give myself away, in body, soul, and estate, all that I am or have in this world unto God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And upon these terms I subscribe myself Thy sworn servant for ever."

Don't throw away your dreams, don't let life beat you, don't grow cynical and soured. Get nearer God. That is the cure.

XIV

ON A PRIMARY LAW OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first."—MATT. xii. 43–45.

IT is with a catch of the breath that one comes upon this little picture hanging in a darkish and not much frequented corner of the Gospels. For both what is painted in for us so vividly, and what seems to loom up dimly in the background, is so awesome and eerie, and full of that queer, shuddering shiver of the spirit that one has when, having sat up alone long past some gusty midnight, reading a weird tale of the supernatural, one climbs the stairs in the darkness with the uncomfortable feeling that there is something horrid just behind one. The lonely little place, with those ugly revels hidden away behind the sunlit windows gazing out so peacefully over the world; the owner's sudden anger, the swift, thorough cleansing, with the evil thing hurled, neck and crop, far out into the night; the house lying there in God's blessed sunshine, swept and pure, but empty; the eyes watching it from afar, and realizing it is empty—no puff of smoke, no footstep, never any inmate bustling to and fro—the stealthy figures creeping towards it in the twilight, peering in through the windows, as Glover says, taking

possession of it unopposed ; and the end comes, with orgies far more hideous than ever polluting the corrupt and desecrated place. It is a shuddery little tale. And the terror of it lies in this, that Jesus tells us frankly that, if we mishandle things, such may, easily enough, be the pitiful end of all our spiritual efforts and successes and even signal triumphs ; that the whole thing may break down in a dreadful reaction that may sweep us further back than we were at the start ; that the huge dam which, with toil and patience and no little engineering skill, we built across our life to keep back some evil may, if we do not watch and tend it carefully, burst suddenly, perhaps without any warning, and the old horror be roaring in brown, raging floods across our life, far worse than ever, spreading tumbling havoc, confusion, and utter ruin everywhere.

That is grave teaching, yet it is there : and we dare not neglect it. And, moreover, it is true to life. We ourselves have known poor souls, caught in the toils of some unhappy habit, somehow pull themselves together, and, sometimes with surprising ease and swiftness, sometimes slowly and doggedly, and with long, sore pain master the thing. And there their life lay, reclaimed from the waste—a garden of the Lord in which He walked with them. And, blessed be God's name, often enough it never reverts ; but grows more green and beautiful with every passing year. Yet Jesus warns us that, unless you watch it and maintain your war against it, the jungle grows back with amazing thoroughness, so that in a year or two you would never know that there had ever been a clearing here at all. The desert can reclaim its own. Have there not been imperial cities, with spacious streets and stately palaces, filled with the hum and bustle and colour and interest of a rich teeming life, and where are they to-day ? Sunk deep in an utter oblivion beneath the desert emptiness, the desert stillness, the far-stretching wastes of arid sand that drift about the lonelinesses where once all that stood. And, says Christ, that can happen

in a life. One day, quite suddenly, some centuries ago, the sand began to blow on our own Moray coast, until thousands of acres of our most fertile land lay there a howling waste, which they are to this day. So, unexpectedly, a spark can alight from nowhere into a well-ordered life, and with that, in a moment it is crackling amid leaping flames, and billowing smoke is tumbling in about our ears. The anger we had stamped out is ablaze again; the selfishness that we had chained is free and rampant; the old evil, half forgotten almost, which we had so thoroughly exorcised, has once more taken possession and is stronger and more masterful than ever. It is a great matter to have won back your soul. But that one valorous exploit, big achievement though it be, is not enough. You have still to consolidate your gains and hold them. "But," says Bunyan quietly, watching the pilgrims, so jocund, and just a little boastful and self-satisfied perhaps—"but they were not yet at their journey's end." And indeed they had many a stiff encounter still before them.

That, I say, is grave teaching. Yet there is no need to get fidgety and flustered and frightened. For we have abundant evidence that God can bring us through whatever may be asked of us. There are proved remedies, and known, tried safeguards. Only we must be sensible, and take ordinary pains, and use the recognized precautions.

To begin with, before we wade deeper, I suppose that this dramatic little tale might be entitled "The Dangers of an Empty Life." But there seems little use in huddling together in a corner, and whispering our fears to one another in that boding way. During the war, the man who went about hinting disaster, with the smell of it in his own nostrils and finding it everywhere, was a bit of a nuisance and not helpful. Why not put it the other way? Why not call this "The Spiritual Value of our Busyness?" It is the same thing; yet it sounds so much more cheery, feels so much more warm and sunny. If an empty life is a life in peril,

then, surely, a full life ought, normally, to be fairly safe—the spiritual value of our busyness! Yet here have we been whimpering about that very thing, telling God a little aggrievedly that He has given us no real chance. In other circumstances something possibly might have come of it all, but not here in the constant din and dust and rush of life where we must concentrate our minds upon dodging through the traffic, have no time for prayer and meditation if we wish to keep alive. Even a Muhammadan couldn't well spread his praying-mat and carry through his devotions midway across the Strand. It is just out of the question. He has handicapped us mercilessly. Setting us where we are, He has, with deliberation, shut us out of all genuine possibility of spiritual nobility, of any marked distinction in Christlikeness.

And in all that there is a real half truth. For so ingenious in evil are these minds of ours, that they can twist anything, even the Cross of Christ, to our actual loss and detriment. A busy life has its own very obvious dangers. We can grow earthy-minded, the world may eat its way into our hearts; we can become so interested in the game of life that, absorbed in the winning of this trick and the next, we may forget that, after all, the stakes for which we are playing—comfort and riches, and a breath of local fame and the like—are very trifling things at best, and that there are far bigger prizes to be had from it than these. "But, Southey," they asked him, when he told them that he gave so many hours a day to reading, and so many more to writing, and so many to correcting proofs, till the possible sum-total was exhausted—"but when do you think?" And we can be so rushed and busy and crowded as to become very superficial, till the soul—oh yes, we say with a start of recollection—yes, of course, the soul; but do you know that really I have no time to remember about that!

Christ once told us why it was in His experience that, in the main, people were not interested in Him, did not close

with Him. It is not usually, He said, because they are specially bad. Oh no! But just because their lives are so full otherwise that they feel no need of Me, and do not see how they can bring Me in. A man has his work, and that fills up his day. He has his oxen, and that field of his must really be ploughed. It is by far too late already. I must see for Myself that, with the best will in the world, he has no time for Me—at least just now. And he wipes his hot forehead, and begins to a new furrow, with his whole attention fastened upon that, and leaves Me behind. And some are getting on, are doing well, have bought a property of sorts; their life is becoming increasingly interesting, and grows more and more so every year, till really I and anything I have to offer—how could that better them? Where could they squeeze it in? And there are others with their household cares and duties, women whose day goes by in a whirl of little tasks that leave them fairly breathless, and men always standing bewildered knee-deep in a confusion of things, always with far too much already to pack into the too few hours; and, in short, so engrossed are they all about this and that that interests them more, to which, indeed, it seems in many instances they must attend, that their religion is apt to fade into a vague and nebulous affair; and nobody seems to have any room for Me. That, ordinarily, is how it happens, so Christ said.

As T. E. Brown once put it, picking up a shell upon the beach:

> "If thou couldst empty all thyself of self,
> Like to a shell dishabited,
> Then He might find thee on the ocean shelf,
> And say, 'This is not dead.'
> And fill thee with Himself instead.
> But thou art all replete with very thou,
> And hast such shrewd activity,
> That when He comes He says, 'This is Enow
> Unto itself—'twere better let it be:
> This is so small and full, there is no room for Me.'"

As we listen to the Master's reading of things, do not our faces flush ? That, as we know to our cost, is a real, a pressing danger. And yet if a busy life has its own self-evident perils, it slams the door, says Christ, upon countless others far more ominous still. The man in the slums (why do we always naturally think of him as the person in peril ? To Jesus Christ those in the West End are in much more obvious and pressing danger. Still to us he looks posted in a dramatically shell-swept spot, and we shiver a little as we think of him)—the man in the slums who comes home from a hard day's work, and has hobbies for his leisure ; who likes a book, or who has an allotment, or who is fond of some game, or who plays with his children, or who good-naturedly gives his wife a hand, or takes her for an outing, has little to fear. It is the unhappy fellow who, all his spare time, hangs slouching about the corners with nothing earthly to do, who is looking for trouble, and who often finds it.

If you have to rise of a morning still tired to face a crowded day, so full indeed that, do what you can, there is always a little more in it than you can wholly overtake, if you lie down at night weary and with the knowledge that to-morrow there must be something of the same fulness and rush, then thank God for it. For work is a wonderful antiseptic, among the most effective of preventives of moral disease. Overwork, certainly, is good for neither man nor beast. From it springs how much of the snappiness and temper —yes, and things far worse—that mar many a home. If a woman has been up a dozen times through the night attending to a fretful child, it is a fool of a man who cannot make a large measure of allowance for a certain crisp tartness. And if that man himself comes home so tired as to have no heart for the little ploy that had been planned, that is not selfishness—the man is " done," as we Scots say—is at the end of his tether and his strength. But why there should be this confident outcry against work these days, why people should seem sure that, given a world in which

we should all labour for no longer than, say, some four hours or so, there would be nearly universal and perennial happiness, it is not easy to find out. For "Work," cried Carlyle—"work is not a curse; it is the greatest blessing in life." And that is not much of an overstatement. Stevenson's prayers do not greatly appeal to me. Somehow they seem to lack the genuine note, to give the impression of one very conscious of his Sunday clothes and broad white collar. Yet when he bids us rise with "a happy morning face" to meet a busy day, to put it through with joyousness, to lie down upon "our resting-beds" at night grateful and pleased that the like waits us on the morrow, he does remind our thankless and forgetful hearts of one of their greatest benefits. Bustled and rushed and jostled, God has not handicapped you, as you think. Rather He has thereby conceded you an enormous start. For the spiritual value of our busyness ought to be very real, and an empty life is full of ever-threatening menace. Did not Luther often find it necessary to rush out among his pigs rather than be alone?

But, further, there is here one of the deepest lessons upon practical religion by the greatest of all Teachers. It is a matter upon which our Lord lays constant stress; few things indeed does He underline more constantly and heavily. In all our spiritual strivings He keeps urging on us, laying it down, as a first law, see that you are, not only negative, but positive as well. Don't merely uproot sins; grow virtues. Don't imagine, falling into that trivial but too common definition of it, that holiness means the lack of evil; for, really, it is filling life with good. A bare field may be clean enough; but, being bare, it invites weeds, and they will come. An empty heart, however pure it be from actual wrong-doing, being empty, remains in a perilous condition. Having won so far, give thanks, and take a breath, but understand your work is not as yet half done.

Indeed, even for that first difficult step of cleansing ourselves from noxious intruders, the positive method is by

far the most effective. That is a fact which many overlook, with the result that they involve themselves in much unnecessary strain and travail, and do not see anything like as much fruit of their efforts as they should. You and I have some besetting sin, some masterful temptation, some characteristic failing, and when we come to ourselves the thing sickens and nauseates us. "It is the mark of a gentleman," said Confucius, "to seek to keep his self-respect, and to find something scalding in the touch of evil." And at times at least we are gentlemen enough for that. It shocks and maddens us that this humiliation should be possible. Not for one moment longer will we have it in our life. And with that we are up upon our feet, with set teeth and grimly determined, tear desperately at this clinging Nessus shirt that is eating into our very soul, rush at the sin with a cold fury in our hearts, trying to master it, and are thrown heavily time after time. Yet every time, when the dizziness has somewhat passed, we rise and fling ourselves again upon it, striking savagely at that sneering face; close with it in another swaying grapple, strain and heave, trying to break its back, and fling it forth a maimed thing, helpless to browbeat us any further. It is an heroic effort, and sometimes it succeeds. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you," says Scripture. And, indeed, hectoring though he is to those who will accept that, he is a bit of a coward when confronted by cool, steady eyes! Mr. Walpole has described such a grim wrestle; and how his hero at long last, getting the required hold upon his settled character, panting, with cracking muscles and a bursting heart, managed to lift the hateful thing clean off its feet, and heaved it fairly out of being.

Sometimes it can be done. And, indeed, is there not something ludicrous in creatures like ourselves, endowed by God with that wonderful instrument a human will which has achieved such sheer impossibilities, as you and I would have declared, which has harnessed the lightning, which has pierced the mountains, which has robbed nature of so many

of her cherished secrets, and tamed her most august and potent ministers into our obedient servants, cheerfully drudging for our comfort—is it not ludicrous that we, with such power in our hands, should cringe and cower before some petty sin, should sit there in our serfdom to it tamed and broken, we who have but to exercise our wills to snap our fetters like mere rushes, to possess the liberty, the kingdom that is ours by right of birth ? Sometimes it works.

And yet the method that you have adopted, valiant though it be, is none the less the crudest, the most trying, far and away the hardest and most tiring and least likely of all ways, to put matters through. Any psychologist, any one who has taken pains to study how these queer, intricate minds of ours really work, will tell you that with absolute confidence. And the Scriptures give us that same urgent warning time on time. For what is it you are doing ? What is your plan of campaign ? Always when you are fighting it, you keep thinking about your sin. In the morning you pray hard to be saved from it ; all through the day, and this the more, the more in earnest that you are, you lay cunning plans against it ; you keep watching a little nervously for its coming, looking round, with a start of apprehension, lest it is stealing towards you ; while in the evening you make confession of it if you have fallen, or thanksgiving if you have escaped it. All very natural, all very right. Watch, said Christ. Only do not you see that a frontal attack such as you keep delivering invites losses ? The more you think about your sin, the firmer do you fasten it in your attention ; yet the more you attend to it, the deeper does it soak into your being ; and the more it so sinks down into your soul, the more does the accursed thing become part of yourself ; and the more that it grows very you of very you (as much at last, as Christ says, as your own hand or eye), the harder is it to eradicate it and be done with it. The real cure is the positive way. To prohibit anything is to create a vacuum, and into that something will rush. If you do not provide

anything better, then it will be the old danger back again, or something worse. An empty house, however clean, invites marauders. Really to conquer something evil we must somehow get a new interest into our life that will so fill it as to leave no room for the other : a new, a stronger attraction that will so hold us that the first, being neglected now, will fade out of our minds almost without any effort on our part. No grown man has to struggle with himself not to play with dolls, making stout morning vows and desperate evening resolutions, and holding to it doggedly in spite of constant disheartening breakdowns, though in his babyhood no doubt he, too, indulged in that. And why ? Because other interests far richer and more satisfying have crowded that childishness out of his life, made it indeed impossible for him, so that nowadays it never even occurs to him. To be safe we must be positive. " If you would kill hatred in your heart," said Buddha, " cultivate kindly feeling." All which the Greeks, of course, told us long ago, in their own beautiful way. To safeguard yourself from the enticements of the sirens, you might have your crew's ears filled with wax, and be yourself bound to the mast ; and that daring experiment worked well enough, though most imperfectly. But it was better, so they found, to take on board with you the most glorious of musicians ; for then your mind, delighted with his exquisite harmonies, never so much as noticed that the sirens were there ; or, if it did, turned with contempt from voices that, in comparison with his, sounded raucous. Though had that other music not been in their ears, these would have thrilled and stormed their hearts, and maddened them, and drawn them over to be sucked down to a swift, cruel death in their cold embraces yonder where the white billows crash against the rocks. It is through our likings we are won or lost ; and until your heart is filled by something you like better than your sin, you are not safe.

Certainly there can be no question about this, that what Samuel Rutherford calls " the world's negative holiness " is

not Christianity. And yet are we sure that that colourless thing is not our real religion ; that our ideal, what we aim at being, is not something vastly lower than Christ's claims on us ? It is not enough not to be bad, we must be good, and goodness does not mean merely the absence of evil ; it is a very positive and real thing in itself. Not to be selfish is one thing, but what He asks is that we must be generous, self-sacrificing, liberal. Our hearts are not meant to be houses swept indeed of all that is foul, but left lying empty ! Ah no ! We will come, says Christ, and make our home in you. And unless His very spirit lives in us, the reason why these souls of ours were made is being unfulfilled and thwarted.

" Know ye not that you are the Temple of God ? " asked Paul. It is not enough that when they meet us, people are not wounded by actual wrong-doing, by a lack of charity in our speech, by a selfishness in our judgments, by a mean outlook which criticizes, and hints faults, and suggests ignoble motives, and leaves the unhappy impression that this world is a shabby kind of place, and men a little stinging breed. But as, when hot, tired folk, who have all week been immersed in mundane things and have largely lost sight of God, turn into a service, and the hush and quiet of the place feels like a cool hand laid upon their aching foreheads, and the babble of the world is shut out and seems far away and curiously unreal, and the big things are the genuine, solid, obvious things, and God is suddenly the most self-evident of facts, a glorious Reality how near, how wonderful, how satisfying, so should they feel when our life touches theirs, as if they had turned into a church, had come into a holier region, had drawn greatly nearer God. So should we, all unconsciously, help and hearten and inspire them, come to them as a breeze from heaven blowing into their stuffy lives, as a word spoken to them by God.

Every one has pointed out that while the characteristic commandment of the Old Testament is " Thou shalt not," the laws of Christ are apt to run the other way, " Thou

shalt." Upon which Seeley, too exuberantly, breaks out that thereby Jesus has discovered a whole new hemisphere of life, has added positive to merely negative morality. That is, quite certainly, extravagant. For there is no great teacher who has not at least caught sight of the long shores of these other continents. The oldest book in the world was written some six thousand years ago, and in it one discovers even then such counsels as "to dwell ever in the house of kindness"; and, when another has quarrelled with you, even if he have no case, don't wait for him to make the first move; you take action, for "it is such souls that cause love to grow in the world." Still, it is very striking how markedly characteristic is our Lord's emphatic insistence that goodness is not a series of prohibitions and restraints and resolute draggings of oneself back from this and that, but an eager running out of the heart to all that is positively kind and generous and helpful.

Yet how apt we all are to live in a little cramped, one-hemisphered earth! The whole world has been watching, not without amusement, the valiant efforts of America to overlook the fact that there is anything across the waters. Let us shut ourselves resolutely into our own hemisphere, let us put and keep our own house in order, let us refuse to mess our hands with wounded travellers who ought to have looked out for themselves better than they have evidently done. For what have we to do with it? And so, twitching their garments well out of the blood, and stepping delicately on the far edge of the road, they have passed by upon the other side through these long, critical years. We are all apt to live like that, to be content with it. Yet does not even etymology tell us that to be self-centred—that was all the word originally meant—quite cleanly self-centred, is to be idiotic?

That is severe. But Jesus is much more so. There is something about a neutral that disgusts His ardent mind. He Himself could not see suffering without longing to share it; could not meet sin without being compelled to throw

Himself into a gallant crusade against it. And for a man to think that he is fulfilling God's will when he keeps his own life fair and straight, never reaching out a helping hand to others hard pressed round him, that sickens Christ—must we not read that too into the tremendous passage ?—fills Him with positive nausea. And the great souls agree with Him. Dante, as every one remembers, found such vapid things, not God's and not the devil's, just their own, cast out from heaven as impossible, and with the very gates of hell slammed with assurance in their faces as beings by far too mean for that. And Zoroaster said the same thing long before him.

What Christ seeks in us is not a mere colourless nonentity, but a soul that is on fire for Him, a life that not only does not tell against Him, but the whole weight of which is thrown wholeheartedly upon His side. Long, long ago, in the tremendous judgment scene in the Book of the Dead, it was not held to be enough that the soul could look each of the guardians of the many virtues in the eyes, and claim that it had not been guilty of the opposite sin. That is as yet a mere negation, not the Holiness that is required. Thereafter it had to declare that it had fed the hungry, clothed the naked, given drink to the thirsty, and a boat to every shipwrecked soul. And so it runs in the New Testament. Dives could say with confidence about the beggar living near his door, that he had never done the man an ill turn in his life. But that to Christ is a thing so elementary as not to be worth reckoning up. No doubt, He says, no doubt; but what good did you do him ? What came of your life ? How is the world the better of it ? All you claim is, it would seem, that you were not a positive nuisance, a moral disease blowing about and grievously infecting others, a positively sinful thing. And are you satisfied with that ? A house is made, not to be swept clean and left empty, but to be inhabited. And your soul was created, not to lie fallow, if fairly free of weeds, but to be covered over, every acre, every yard, ay, every foot and inch of it with the living gold of a rich harvest.

And if that be not there—when autumn comes, what good is an empty, though clean, field to the farmer; and how is God the better for your life?

And so it comes to this, does it not, that for a real spiritual success we must get a new attraction into our life, and not merely struggle, however bravely, to cast out what is unworthy. Almost anything can help so far. A wastrel of a laddie becomes keen to gain his place in the team, or a clean ambition bites him, or a girl comes into his life, and he is lifted above his own sorry self, grows a bigger and a better man, living his life on a new principle and plan. But far the most effective of all interests to save one from oneself is Jesus Christ. "And such were some of you," says the apostle, rounding off an appalling catalogue of human depravities. In your hearts, too, these horrible things once burrowed, and crawled, and found a secure haunt. And where are they now? Utterly vanished, like a horrible nightmare when one wakens and the strangling dream is gone! And how? Because your soul met Jesus Christ, and a new standard of what became you forced itself upon you, and made the old way of things impossible: because face to face with this new Friend of yours you felt burningly, like Zacchæus, that the life that had satisfied you, that had seemed quite clever and good enough, would not do for a comrade of Christ: because the rush of new interests, new pleasures, new desires, that He brings with Him sickened you of the cheap, tawdry, vulgar booths of sin and of the world, with their flaring lights and their hoarse voices and their tinselled shabby nothings: because somehow, with Him beside you, you found that you could will what you had often wished to will, in vain; could like what you knew you should like, yet could not like; could be what your heart had kept telling you you ought to be, though hitherto to little purpose. So multitudes have found.

If things are not progressing well with us, is not the reason for that simply this—that we have not let Christ into

our life, or that we have somehow drifted from Him? A real poet tells us in a trite passage that while he, a laughing, careless, thoughtless lad, put through his life like all the other boys around him:

> "I have a temple I do not
> Visit, a heart I have forgot:
> A self that I have never met,
> A secret shrine, and yet, and yet
> That sanctuary of the soul
> Unwitting I keep clean and whole,
> Unlatched and lit, if Thou shouldst care
> To enter, and to tarry there."

He made a very splendid ending. And yet that heart that he describes was in a very perilous condition. For, says Christ, so long as the shrine is empty, who can tell what may not seize it, and appropriate it to its own sinister uses. Get Christ into your life. That is the only safety. And, indeed, He is not far from any one of us. "Behold," He says, "I stand at the door, your very door, and knock." Do you not often hear that knocking, urgent, insistent, claiming entrance, pealing through your heart? Get Christ into your life! You need Him, and you cannot do without Him, and He makes so glorious a difference!

If a strong man armed, He said, keep his palace, his goods are safe. Ah, but we were not strong; weakly we threw away our arms; and we have lost our soul! For enemy troops, billeted upon us, loll about our heart; and though we loathe them, and glare at them with a smouldering hatred burning in our eyes, and muttered curses on our lips, we have to fetch and carry for them now. For they are strong and armed, and what can we do in our weakness? But, says Christ, if a stronger come and overthrow them, how were it then? And at that an intoxicating hope leaps up within us; and we look towards Him with a wild, amazed questioning on our eager faces. And, "Yes," says Christ, with confidence, "I can." Get Christ into your life! For He will cleanse it, keep it, fill it, hold it safe. And nothing else will do.

XV

THE VALOUR OF RELIGION

"Therefore, being engaged in this service and being mindful of the mercy which has been shown us, we are not cowards."—2 Cor. iv. 1 (Weymouth).

THAT is a proud boast, and yet who can challenge it? Paul himself was a man whom you had either to love with a passionate hero-worship, or else dislike with a fanatical hatred. And, indeed, he was a very human bundle of loudly clashing contradictions—this fiery soul, tenderer than a woman, and yet at times crudely provocative; as when he cried, I turn to the Gentiles; and with that shook out his garment in the outraged faces of his countrymen, as if ridding himself of noxious insects—a vivid insult they were little likely to forget. But whatever else they thought of him, no one could doubt his courage. Never was there a more intrepid soul. You could not break or daunt him, could not bring a glint of fear into those steady eyes. Often for weeks on end his life was one long whirl of exciting adventure, with death lurking for him in every shadow and at the dark mouth of every alley. Mind you, said Christ to certain aspirants to discipleship—mind you, this will cost; will mean loss, and sacrifice, and the gale full in your face! Yes, says Paul, it costs to be a Christian; and with that heaps up military metaphors, and paints the picture of a gallant little band, harried by enemies in overwhelming numbers who, eager to finish things, keep rushing them time after time. And the line gives. And they are down.

And it is over then. But no! Once again they have scrambled somehow to their feet, and have re-formed, have beaten off this new assault, are moving forward steadily. We are no cowards, we Christian folk, Paul cries proudly; our daily life proves that. So it is still. "A terrible fight against God is going on," said Père Didon, "and brave soldiers are needed to meet it. I intend to be one of these heroes." And, again, "Sometimes I am afraid that you are not heroic. It is not enough to be merely good; you must be brave even to heroism."

Yet there has always been an obscure notion lingering about certain minds that Christianity is in its essence a weakly kind of thing. Nietzsche, for instance, kept snarling at it as effeminate and enervating, with its talk of pity and tenderness and humility and forbearance. Let us fling ourselves boldly into the wild mêlée of life, he cried, asking no quarter, and expecting none. And if the weakling goes to the wall, who cares about weaklings? The man to whom it falls by right will force his way through the press to what is his own, if only he is not impeded by this sickly prating, this slushy sentimentalism, which handicaps the strong, and gives the puny an unfair advantage, and takes the pith and stamina out of the breed. Competition is the law of health: and it is there, wrestling with difficulties and struggling with his peers, that man has gained his valour and his hardihood of soul. "I was not swaddled, rocked, and dandled into a legislator," declared Burke. And man cannot be swaddled, rocked, and dandled into what life claims from him.

No doubt. But it is a queer reading of matters that dismisses Christianity impatiently as a mollycoddling kind of thing! When it swept the world it did so, all men being witnesses, through its sheer audacity of daring. "We are told," says Aristotle, "that there are men so foolhardy that you cannot terrify them; the Celts, for instance," so he says. That was what struck the world about these early

Christians. You could not terrify them. They laughed at danger, scoffed at suffering, welcomed death. And what could ordinary folk, with some natural shrinking from pain and loss and dying, do against these fearless creatures who so recklessly flung their lives away, except give way before them? I became a Christian, so Tertullian tells us, because these people were far braver in their lives and in their deaths than anybody else, and I wanted to learn and share the secret of their courage. And if we lose that touch of extra gallantry, that brave coolness of spirit, that fearlessness of heart, then we are false to Christ.

Ours is a difficult day, with much in it depressing and disheartening. It is for us who know God to keep calm when others are flustered, and steady where they rush about distractedly; to prove that the faith does really give an added strength and manliness and bigness of nature. Do you recall that glorious tale of St. Francis, how one day he who had no fear in all the world save one, he the young gallant who exulted in the crash of the jousts, saw that fear coming up a lane to meet him, "white and horrible in the sunlight," as Mr. Chesterton says, and his heart stood still a moment? And then, leaping from his horse, he ran to face it, and threw his arms round the poor leper. By and by, when he looked back, they say, there was no figure on the road. It is by facing life courageously one gets nearest to Christ.

Yet we are told, with almost truculent confidence, that in our day the Church has lost that note. Don't you deceive yourselves, they urge upon us with assurance: if the pews are emptier than they were wont to be it is not really because of intellectual doubts and problems—that is, after all, a minor matter—but because those with any spirit of adventure in their soul do not find themselves at home in the Church, and feel it has nothing to offer them. In Christ's own day it was only bold creatures who dared to push their way to Him through the thick press of opposition and unpopularity;

and they did so because they felt that it was beside Him that they would come upon the real romance and excitement of life. But now, what is there to attract such people ? The Church seems to them tame and prosaic, prim and deadly dull. It calls up in their minds no ringing shout of valour, no glorious self-sacrifice that makes one's blood run faster, but the stale smell of tea-meetings ! And when, longing to help the world, they come to us with their offers of eager service, it sets them and their chivalry to what ? To teaching a few inattentive urchins, or to tramping round a collecting district, only that. And so indignantly they toss away, betaking themselves and their hot enthusiasm elsewhere, where some real and more effective use is made of them. The Church has lost its call to heroism, has grown drab and comfortable and commonplace, small in mind and imagination, and with that its appeal to the great heart of man is gone. It may be still a kind of ambulance waggon lumbering heavily in the rear of things, useful enough for picking up the limping laggards that have failed to stay the pace of life and fallen out, the weakly and faint-hearted. But at the first, people attached themselves to Christ not only through their weaknesses, but through the things most glorious in them, their courage, their daring, their lust for risk and warfare and adventure. And now, what room is there in Church life for the exercise of these ? The water of life that used to rush and leap in power, all a-sparkle in God's sunshine, has dwindled into a dead pond, stagnant and scum-covered.

I wonder if that is a fair criticism, or an honest statement of the facts ? Twice in my own lifetime have I seen my own Church called to pass through a burning fiery furnace seven times heated, and it did it just as valiantly as any of the greatest generations of the past. Once it was stripped of every stone and every penny it possessed. And who faltered or quailed or took to looking back faint-heartedly across his shoulder ? " That Church will be free that dares to be free," cried Rainy. And we dared : and we won our freedom.

While in theology, everywhere there has been cataclysm and upheaval. The things most fixed and settled have been tossed back into the crucible. Our whole conception of what the Bible is, and of what inspiration means, has been remodelled. It has been an unnerving time. Yet the Church has come through it marvellously well, with brave and quiet hearts.

Oh yes, you cry, no doubt in your own little province you have managed not so ill. But the Church has no leadership, and is afraid to try to have it. About the problems that are really exercising people's minds, filling their thoughts and hearts, it has nothing to say, possesses not one glint of vision. During the war nobody bothered about the Church; every one elbowed and jostled it aside into a corner. And no one looks to it for guidance in the tangles and the puzzles of the day, or expects it to lead the way out into a promised land of greater economic or political freedom. What Ruskin spat out in a very scornful passage long ago is nowadays the settled conviction of many passionate minds hot in their contempt for an organization which, they say, does nothing, dare not do it, is a mere nuisance and futility, a cumberer of the ground far better away. When Turner, he says, paints the religion of England, Christianity as we see it here, he shows you a meek old woman and a child being led into a pew, for whom reading by candlelight may be beneficial. "For the rest, this religion seems to him discreditable—discredited—not believing in itself: putting forth its authority in a cowardly way, watching how far it might be tolerated, continually shrinking, disclaiming, finessing: divided against itself, not by stormy rents, but by thin fissures and splittings of plaster from the walls. Not to be obeyed, or combated, by an ignorant yet clear-sighted youth—only to be scorned."

But, when you examine things a little closer, may not this mean simply that the Church is holding steadfastly to its own job? Once on a day I went in a funeral carriage with three working men I never saw before nor since from

Glasgow to Paisley and back. And scarcely had we started when they began to rail with vehemence against the Church. Upon which I, pointing out that we had a long time before us, suggested that it would be more profitable surely if, instead of hurling about general vague charges, they would condescend on details, tell where the Church was wrong, and how things might be righted. The first man said at once that the real difficulty is that all ministers are hypocrites, basing this sweeping charge on the one fact, that when his boy had lain for weeks and months ill of a wasting illness almost every other afternoon his minister had dropped in for a little to play patience with the laddie. "What do you think of that?" the father cried, his face aflame even at the thought of it! "I think," said I, "it was extraordinarily like what Christ, too, would have done, and wish that folk could go about gathering as bonnie anecdotes concerning me!" The second held that the root trouble is that we will keep on preaching our fusty old gospel which, said he, everybody has heard scores of times, and no one wants to hear ever again. For no one now believes in it. "We do," I said. "And if you wish to advertise some cheap-jack medicines of your own, set up your own organization for that purpose." While the third assured me soothingly that he could show me in ten seconds how to have our churches crowded. If all you ministers will only join a certain political party—his party!

That is the real truth at the back of much of all this discontented talk against the alleged inaction of the Church. People do not believe in the gospel for which it stands, have their own nostrums: and unless we are prepared, forgetting and forgoing our own remedy, to take to shouting theirs, they hurl ugly jibes at us as cowardly.

No doubt at all, our Lord reminds us stingingly that to pass by upon the other side and leave unhappy people in their troubles is to call down His hot indignation and His open scorn. Beyond all question such a hideous fact as one-roomed houses is the queerest commentary on the so-

called Christianity among us, and a direct insult to God. If we are Christ's, we must be up and doing about things like that. But it is all a question of emphasis and of method. How can we help things best? The age says confidently, change the social or the economic or the political system, and the rest will follow. But if the Church agrees with Christ that the sore is far deeper; and that while a new environment in many ways may be, and is, imperative, for a real remedy, it is men's hearts that must be changed—is it, because that is unpopular, to let itself be drawn away from that, the one permanent cure, as it believes, to babble about politics and economics, about which it knows no more than anybody else; and which, in any case, it is quite sure can never reach down to the horrible cancerous growth and pluck it out?

Our Lord used to speak with a grave seriousness of the sin of the wrong emphasis; and that to people hugely in earnest, but whose scale of values was, He said all wrong; and their whole day-dreams and endeavours out of drawing and perspective. "These things," He said, laying His hand on certain matters, "are what you ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone," so somewhat lightly dismissing what these hot, hard-breathing folk were bending their whole overtaxed energies to carry through, as being all-important. And in our own way is it not so now, and that that people are forgetting?

They brought the very same charges against Christ in His own day that they are levelling at the Church now. Indignantly, they who had, at first, been much attracted to Him came to the conclusion that there was nothing in Him. Look at the state of matters round us, they cried angrily—how Rome grinds us down, how these publicans fatten on our misery, how poor and desperate we are. And He has hardly a word to say about all that,but keeps talking, talking, talking about our hearts and sins. Our hearts are all right; there is nothing wrong with us; but we have never had a

chance, and can't have until this whole system of things that is choking us is shattered. And they turned away as from an unpractical mouther, an abstract theorist who did not get down to the point and pinch of things. "Why will you still be talking? Nobody minds you." But Christ held steadfastly to His own settled course, and refused to be cajoled aside to win anybody's favour or applause.

"Master," a man cried, interrupting Him, not interested in His home-thrusts and plain speaking, getting down to what he took to be real business—"Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." That is what every one is bawling at us nowadays. Get the working man to give a fair day's work for a reasonable wage, and we will begin to think that there is something in the Church. Get the employers to give us bigger money and more comfort and a fuller share in things, and we will rally to you. Do something practical, not merely talk—something that really matters. And what was Christ's answer? "Who made Me a judge or a divider over you? You beware of covetousness." And is not that the message that, if it is to be loyal to Christ, the Church must keep repeating in this wild babble of clashing interests of class and class, each thrusting itself on our notice, and confidently claiming our support? "You beware of covetousness."

If it is the duty of the Church—and who can question it?—face to face with the staring social problems of our time, not indeed to evolve economic and political remedies (that is the business of the politician and economist), but to do something far more radical and vital—to make its people see and feel uneasily that these evils are here; to keep bluntly telling them that in view of them the lives of many of us are by far too comfortable, and that to possess even a touch of the spirit of Christ must mean a willingness to forgo much that attracts us; to bear taxation cheerfully even in these difficult days; to face a more pinched life than we would naturally choose, both for ourselves and for our children, in

order that these horrors may be righted ; that that is for us a part of the bearing of Christ's cross, and that as Christian people we dare not shirk it, ought to welcome it ; that it is for things like that, indeed, that Christ has called us, for that we are here ; none the less is not that in these days the Church's easier task ? The harder and less popular part of duty is to remind an age absorbed in the quest of material betterment that, after all, man's life does not consist in higher wages or in shorter working hours ; to tell a generation obsessed by a kind of mania for self-expression, clamouring noisily that one must be given the chance of living out his life fully and in his own way, that there is such a virtue as self-sacrifice ; to confront a day hoarse and raucous with shouting for its rights with the forgotten fact that there is a still bigger thing even than rights—that there is Christlikeness, yes, and that Christlikeness consists very largely of a voluntary abnegation of one's rights for others.

Is it only in the field that service is splendid—only in war that self-sacrifice is glorious ? Elsewhere is all chivalry to be smothered in a wild crushing mêlée for what each of us can get ? Is the Church really daft—the Church which has the Cross for symbol—if it reminds folk of a saying, in which it at least still believes, that it is those who throw away their lives for others who save them, that our industrial disputes, like everything else, must be judged under the solemn shadow of the Cross, and that with that falling across it, the refusal in a day of national crisis to work an extra hour looks mean and petty, and has simply not the touch of Christ ?

That is the point to which the Church must keep, and it is never popular. Other organizations can allure folk to them by the promise of an increase in their comfort, or in their material well-being. What the Church has to offer is an advance in moral character, and the glory of self-sacrifice for others. And unless people feel the thrill of that, of course they turn impatiently away, and flock elsewhere.

There was a long roar for Barabbas. He was a man of

action who wanted something practical, as men say, done. But not one voice was raised for Christ. And that partly because men were afraid to break the daunting silence. And it takes some courage for the Church to keep rowing hard against the stream of thought about us; to hold on preaching its own message; to dare to look men and women in the eyes and tell them frankly that their ideals are too shallow, that their big dreams are largely vain, that the cherished schemes which they so confidently advocate as a complete panacea can of themselves do little to produce what they are seeking; that we must get deeper, and see that the sores are worse, far worse, than they appear to think; not to be healed by some cheap economic tinkering, though that may help; but that we ourselves must become new creatures with other aims and ends and ambitions and lives, and nothing less can meet the case.

I wonder, is the Church so cowardly, so visionless, so inept after all?

But it is only a fool who does not learn from his critics. And it were well for us to examine again this charge so confidently brought against us by eager minds, staggered because they feel that we are holding back from what they take to be the hottest of the fighting. And in truth are we not guilty of a certain lack of imagination that is sinful? We are so used to many evils round about us that we don't see or notice them, are not hurt by them, are not maddened into grimly determining that, please God, these must end. Or, if they do come home to us, are we not apt to be a little hopeless and unexpectant? What can we do? we ask. These ugly things are woven into the stuff of life and are engrained in human nature. So it has always been, so it must always be.

What can we do? More than we think. The Church's power is a tremendous thing, if it would only use it. When Napoleon fell and was sent to Elba, his wife, Marie Louise, deserted him, to the disgust of her grandmother, who hated Napoleon with a rancorous hate, but had nothing but scorn

for a woman who could leave her husband in his trouble. "But what can I do?" the younger woman asked. "There are guards in the passages, and I am watched." "My daughter," said the other, "you could always drop from a window." If she had really wished to go, she could have found a way. And if we really wished to put things straight, if we believed in our own gospel and the power of God, if we took it and tried it and used it, things that seem rooted round the earth's foundations would come up in our hands, and hoary evils that have lasted centuries, because every one assumes they are immovable, would melt like mists before the sun! Is there a streak of cowardice in us Christian people after all? You remember what Dean Butler snapped out to the evangelist, asking, "Have you found peace?" "No," he replied, "I have found war!" And, Myers, too, tells us, what is surely the first axiom of this whole side of things, the first beginning of real faithfulness, "Remember that first of all a man must, from the torpor of a foul tranquillity, have his soul delivered unto war." Zoroaster and Mithras and Christ have all in turn won men's allegiance not least by this that theirs was a soldier's religion, a call to service, an appeal to fling oneself into the battle and throw our whole weight on the side of God. And to be faithful we must answer to it, must not merely be moved by what others have done, but rise up eagerly and play our part in our own day with a like reckless gallantry.

And so in our own lives. Here are we anxious and worried and fidgety; and Jesus looks at us with that queer look almost of shame that a brave man wears in face of others' cowardice. You are afraid, He says: you are afraid of life, else you would not be so troubled and careworn. And, as Emerson says, what does it matter what I fear? If I do fear, I am a coward. You are afraid, says Christ, looking round with amazement on this flustered world, you with a Father to take care of you, you hemmed in by a care on which you can depend, a grace that never sleeps, you, of all men,

who knowing what you do know, have the least need to be frightened !

Or, we are aware that there are things in our character that ought not to be there. And in truth we ourselves hate and loathe them. Yet we have not the pluck to order them to the door. What is the use ? we tell ourselves despondently. They will not go, are stronger than I am, won't take dismissal, but flout me to my face ! And so they lounge there at their ease ; and though we glower at them with murder in our hearts, at their first whistle we are quick to fetch and carry as they bid us, poor abject, broken souls without a spark of independence left in us ! Not I, cries Paul, and gives us the picture of an indomitable little figure in the prize-ring, bruised and bloodied, and with the breath often knocked out of him, but always scrambling dizzily to his feet again unconquered. I buffet my body, he cries, I pound it black and blue, I will not let the worse part of me master me—never, never ! Not I, says Christ, facing the enormous difficulties of His daunting life with those quiet eyes of His. " Courage, lads ! " You recall that that was ever His favourite greeting. " Courage, lads ; we Christians are not cowards ! "

How, then, are we to win this valour ? Paul tells us here how it woke in him and his companions. Therefore, He says, twice over, revealing the foundations upon which it rests. It was, it seems, because of two wonderful facts this courage grew to being in their hearts, became instinctive and inevitable.

And the first of them was, that they had heard good news, the best of news. And everybody knows the difference that makes. When some one whom we love is ill and the reports are gloomy, how listlessly we drag ourselves about our tasks. But let there come word of improvement, and somehow our hands and feet are lighter, quicker, more efficient, and we do with ease what had the day before been nearly impossible. Or it was like the coming of spring. During the long winter, people set their teeth, and face the steep brae of the weeks ahead. But, when spring comes,

there is a new lift about things, and we seem to grow wings where we had trudged with tired feet in the mud. And Paul takes both these facts, and, as it were, compresses them into one overcrowded metaphor. "The sunshine of the good news of the glory of God in Christ" has broken in upon us, so he says. That is what wrought the change, gave us our valiant hearts.

And we can understand. During the war we had a rough time of it at the start, with little to encourage us, and people doggedly clenched their wills. If more men are required, then we will go; if further sacrifice is needed, we will face it; if any call is made upon us, we are ready to respond. But we will never yield. But you remember how it heartened us when a new ally came in—Italy, Roumania, at long last, America. And these men felt like that. They, too, were fighting dourly a grim, uphill battle with much to dishearten them. And then they heard God had come in, had thrown in everything He has to make their victory certain, saw it with their own eyes, and knew that it was true. And with that everything was different, and their despondent hearts were light; and, like troops, after days of dreary falling back when the tide turns, they rushed upon the enemy cheering, laughing, singing, absolutely unafraid. God has come in: and we must win: and nothing can resist us now!

If you are growing dowie, faint-hearted, unexpectant, get you to Calvary, and stand there for a little time, and take in once again what you have at your back to draw upon, and what must tumble into ruins before your hope can be worsted and go out, and you will scorn the sin that masters you, will laugh at the temptation that would terrorize you, will know most surely that, weak though you may be, you must be more than conqueror through God that loves you, who loves you like that.

There is a bonnie story, I suppose a legend, that when in the first days of the struggle the British troops were landing in France and swinging through the streets cheering and

shouting "Hip, hurrah!", the children, to whose ears tales of disaster and retreat were blowing from the Front, bravely translated the coming of their allies and their alien shout into a very comfortable promise, "*Il pourra!* he is able! he will manage! he will pull it off!" they cried about the streets, and laughed at fear. That is the very spirit of the Testament. "He is able," they keep saying happily, is surely able to meet every call upon us, and went on to meet them unafraid.

Further, says Paul, we have a wonderful hope, we Christian folk, which puts new heart and courage into the most timid. Many have asked how it was Christianity managed to sweep the world. No two lists of the reasons are alike; but in them all, I think, there figures this, that one of the main causes of its triumph was its glorious certainty of immortality. Seneca tells us that one day he was dallying with that great hope, and had almost persuaded himself that perhaps it might be true, when a letter arrived from somebody, and it all faded away. But these Christian folk were sure of it, and, being sure, looked not at the passing shadows of the seen, but at the long reality of the unseen. And that gave them a new scale for things, made them contemptuous of much that frightened others, or else wrecked their souls. Therefore, says Paul again, we are not cowards.

No doubt Ruskin alleges confidently that we are not helped much by those whose minds are filled by thoughts of the next world, but rather by such as fling themselves out into this one here about us now, and work for it, hoping that something good, what they themselves may not be sure, will come of that for it and for their fellows. That is the popular teaching of the day, and sounds a healthy human kind of creed. Only it happens that the sober facts of history prove it to be the exact opposite of truth. It is the men whose minds have been filled by the unseen who have had the wit and strength and valour to dare the big things for us here. And surely that is what one might expect. For, take away the hope of immortality, let the grave be the

final goal for all, prove to us that this wonderful human story is to end in this earth, rolling once more dark, unpeopled, dead, a mighty grave in which lie buried in utter oblivion all the valour, all the struggles, all the marvellous achievements of these hot, daring human hearts; and that nowhere in time or in eternity will any one be any better for the big brave dreams, for the marvellous feats accomplished, for the truths seen, and the heights of goodness won by the long, slow, glorious endeavour, all that will have gone out again—and even so, please God, we will still try to make our passing tale as gallant an epic as we can. But surely if we hold that every child we teach is an immortal spirit, and that this character of ours at which we toil will last for ever, and that this story of our race is as yet only in its opening chapters and will move on into ever-deepening glory, that gives a reason to be up and doing, an inspiration whipping us into the field, a hope that makes the weakest of us big and brave, that nothing else can offer.

And that is why it is so ominous, that in our generation, apart from rather shabby listening at the keyhole, there is so little feeling that there is another world. Our very day-dreams are all earthy; our biggest hopes seem bounded by the narrow horizons of time, our heart is thrown into endeavours simply to improve our own lot, or else that of others, for the few years we are here. We are forgetting that we are immortal spirits, who own much more than this little speck of earth. "Mathematician though I was, I forgot two magnitudes," said Chalmers. "I forgot the shortness of time: I recklessly forgot the vastness of eternity." And it was only tardy remembrance of that that made a man of him, that called out all his slumbering greatness, that stung him to all those unresting labours for the men about him here. And that is as true of the race.

There is no sadder sight in nature than the sunset, and yet Faber speaks about "where the days bury their golden suns in the dear, hopeful west." It is only a Christian who

can talk like that, because, as Clement said, Christ "changes all our sunsets into dawns." When our dead die, we know that they do not go out of being; when the chill evening breezes are upon our cheeks, we face the darkness without fear, and with eyes watching for the sunrising we know will come. "I am the First and I am the Last," said Christ. And we know that is true, that we are hemmed in and encircled by a whole eternity of love, from which we can't escape; that never since the beginning of beginningless Eternity has God not been thinking of us with that fulness of love we see embodied in Christ; that never until an endless eternity does end will He cease so to think of us. The hills will vanish like the shadows blown along them, the earth be only a dim memory, the whole huge universe fall in and tumble into ruin, but even then God's love of you and me will be as real, as sure, as strong, as true, as ever, not gone like all else that we knew—still there. And, knowing that, how can we quail or falter or lose heart? We are not cowards, we Christian folk, and cannot be.

And if our frail hearts, knowing their querulousness and timidity, hearing that bold assertion, grow shamefaced and shy, we have the remedy of things in our own hands. For how did Alexander become Alexander? "He well found," says Philip Sidney, "he received more bravery of mind by the pattern of Achilles, than by hearing the definition of fortitude," took with him upon his campaigns, not books on strategy, but Homer, and kept soaking his soul in that. And we have a far nobler pattern, if we care to use it.

XVI

ON A NEW STANDARD OF MEASUREMENT

"This is My commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."—JOHN xv. 12.

TWO amazing things stare at us out of the Testament, and which of them is the more wonderful I do not know. The one is, of course, that there before our eyes moves the most glorious Figure by far that the world has ever seen, which, photographed in all kinds of situations, taken at the most unguarded moments, stands out consistently so august, so love-worthy, so perfect, so unique, that the most beautiful and daring dream that ever visited the mind of man looks mean and shabby in comparison with this which is no dream, but a thing actually lived. And those who tell us of Him know in their very souls that there never was anything like Jesus Christ, that on to the end of an endless eternity there cannot be anything better, that even God can give us nothing so wonderful as this Saviour in whom the neediest soul finds everything that it can possibly want, whose coming into the world has altered the whole situation, whom they do not merely reverence but worship, against whom they lean confidently the most tremendous hopes, about whom they heap up words and attributes which, if applied to any other, would have shocked their souls as blasphemous outrages, but which used of Jesus Christ fret them as unseemly only because of their palpable inadequacy—poor trivial words thrown out only a little way in the direction of the fulness of the facts, in whose face they

see God's, to whom they pray, and whom they hail as God's Son in a sense no other ever was, or is, or can possibly be. That, surely in itself, is tremendous enough.

But to that there is added this further astonishment, that as we stand beside them, gazing up at this wonderful Christ, so high above our own crude blundering and futile strivings, so far away from the smallnesses too characteristic of ourselves, these men of the New Testament say to us, as if speaking the merest thing of course: You understand that that is what you have to be! That! we cry, Me! But with quiet insistence they keep saying, "Yes, and nothing less than that will do." Boldly they take this life and character they know to be unique, a thing undreamed of in the glistering glory of its white perfection till it came, and calmly adopt it as the norm and standard of what is required from all of us, from plain and humdrum folk like you and me, pushing our way among the jostle of the dusty streets.

We had read it as a tale of gallant chivalry blown to us from a more romantic world than ours, and with which we, in our prosaic factory age, have, and can have, of course, nothing to do. We had imagined that if we shuffled through life in a decent, kindly way, if we conformed to the prevalent customs, and did not fall behind the people round about us, we would meet our requirements reasonably well. But they insist that what God asks of us is Christlikeness, and that from us who have once seen Him less than that is sin. There, surely, is a staggering claim! No other artist ever learned the secret of Titian's red. In any gallery it flames out from afar, with its splendour of richness calling aloud the painter's name. Hang any picture beside it, and though that other may be quite a sound and even striking piece of work, it will by that trying comparison be made to look dull and commonplace and dingy. Yet the New Testament insists on taking us to Calvary, insists on setting us beside the Cross, insists on judging our life there, against that tremendous

background, keeps looking from it to that, and if they do not match, then we have failed. We, too, must have Christ's mind; we, too, must use life in Christ's way; we, too, must catch Christ's very spirit and must reproduce it in the little nothings that make up our days. So they keep telling us over and over.

And the stress that they lay on that they learned from Christ Himself, who had a way of saying, "As I," "as I," "as I," of urging His example on us as a standard, of telling us that the old measures of things have become altogether out of date, and that henceforward He Himself is the one test by which we stand or fall.

That insistence on a quite new standard of measurement is one of the most striking things even in the Gospels, and until we learn and use it in the living of our lives, we are not Christian folk at all. "It is not enough," declares Dryden, "that Aristotle has said so, for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides, and if he had seen ours might have changed his mind." We have seen Christ, and all the former standards have grown obsolete.

And yet to teach us to appreciate that is one of Christ's chief difficulties. We will use the old outworn measures, will persist in trying ourselves by crude and rudimentary tests, with results far more flattering than the facts warrant. We will not take it in that we are living in a new age; and that what used to serve will not pass muster now. The world, our fellows, our own habits, the general trend of things about us, the prevalent customs, the usual ways, slightly amended it may be, these are our standards. But, says Christ, a Christian must conform to Me, must, in his thinking and his living, use the new scale of measurement which I have introduced. As I, as I, as I, He keeps repeating. There is your norm and standard—never forget that.

And the early Christians took that very literally. One of them, Methodius, declares that all of us must so participate in Christ that we shall all become Christs. At which we

shrink back instinctively, feeling that such language is unseemly, that there is but one Saviour, and that to all eternity. He stands alone, with a huge gap between Him and the nearest. Yet Christ Himself presses the similarities between Himself and us that are to be—yes, and that even now exist, He says—to heights that leave us staring in bewildered amazement, and that make it very certain that quite evidently we have not even begun to realize what His hopes for us are, and what our faith is meant to be and do.

Ah, if only you and I lived out what Christ expects of us, you there in your place, and I here in mine, not waiting for others to begin, like certain Socialists who meantime retain their capital till a general millennium dawns, what would not happen in our day and time! For, look at a few of the astounding comparisons He makes between us and Himself —as I, as I, as I!

Did it ever strike you that in one real sense you are called of God to the same work as Jesus was; created for the same ends; that in a way He looks to you as He once looked to Christ to help Him in His saving of this needy world? That almost shocks you. And yet, says Christ, speaking to His Father, "As Thou has sent Me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world." What does that mean? Surely not less than this, that as from all eternity God saw with pity this lost, sinful, ailing world that was to be, that as, once time had come, He moved about the earth, seeking to help and save, and not too much resulted from His eager grace, He thought out Jesus Christ, devised for us that marvellous Saviour, and confidently committed the tremendous task to Him. It will take courage, desperate courage; it will need faith, such faith as no other heart could show. But you will never fail Me, that I know. Nor did He. For in the end Christ looked into God's eyes and said, "I have finished the work that Thou gavest Me to do." Even so, said Christ, have I chosen you; even so have I put My cause into your care and keeping; even so send I you. And I, too, do it

without fear. From you, also, it will need courage. For often there will not be much to show. From you, too, there will be asked a long boldness of stubborn faith. Yet I am sure you will not fail Me. But as I gave Myself, so you will give yourselves; as I have been wholehearted, so you, too, will be, holding back nothing, granting Me your all, offering a service of the same type as My own—as I, so you.

And He speaks often in that way. "I am the Light of the world," He claims. And so, indeed, He is. Only when the sun rises do the glories of the earth that had lain hidden show before our astonished eyes. And only when one comes on Jesus Christ does one begin to understand how rich and full and splendid is this life that God has planned for us. But so are you, He adds, speaking to very ordinary mortals. You, too, I am quite certain will so live that those about you, marking your cheerfulness, your faith, your courage, your unselfish aims and ways, will take in with a gasp of astonishment how big and brave a human life can be, and, with the light of your example on them, will grow ashamed of their own works of darkness, of their whimpering, their moral weakness, their selfishness, and will learn better things from you, somewhat as you have done from Me.

Or He was fond of likening His gift to us to running water. That is a dry land where the burns often die out, and there are left only the bleached stones of the empty courses. And then there fall the rains, and through the countryside is heard again that music which Christ's heart so loved of water leaping among stones, and babbling, chattering, fretting, singing as it hurries. And with that there come coolness, and fresher air, and a new energy for jaded hearts and weary bodies, and all the land is lush again with young and vivid green. So when I come into a life, He says, the parched and dusty deadness becomes spring, and there fall healing rains; and everywhere there is the sound of running waters in their rush and happiness; and drab hearts blossom into summer, and put on new beauty, waken to new

hopes. Yes, He adds with assurance, and if any one really believes in Me and lives in the strength of My gospel, in His life also, though he will not know it, there will be a well of ever cool and clear and bubbling water, a perennial fountain of courage and good cheer and inspiration and valour of heart, always springing up out of the deeps of things, at which other tired and thirsty souls will draw all that they need to hearten and refresh them.

It is a bonnie picture that the Scriptures paint us of the well in the coolness of the evening at which, the heat and dust of the day over, the rush and noise of life died down, people gather with their empty vessels, sure of gaining all they need to carry them through all the glare that lies before them on the morrow. And Christ expects that that will be the outcome in the hot, tired, fearful hearts about us of chancing upon us : that in a dim and shadowy way, as to meet Him puts a new hope and purpose into us, so to meet us will make others ashamed of their faint-heartedness, surer of God, bigger and braver and more faithful, with their dry waterpots filled full, and their dusty hearts grown cool and fresh again. So He keeps urging on us in a dozen metaphors —as I, as I, as I. The works that I do, He once said, you, too, will do—yes, and even greater. Greater than Christ's ! From you and me ! What does it mean ? This, at least, beyond any question, that Christianity, as we are living it, is clearly not even a shadow of what Christ intends that it should be. There is a certain palpable drop between the Gospels and the Acts. Yet the same spirit is in both ; something of the same wonders, and the same achievements, and the same glorious power of Christ runs on from the one into and through the other. And between our life and the Gospels there ought to be no clashing contrast, no clear-cut and obvious break. It, too, should run on, showing the same pattern we see there, life put to the same uses, ours matching with Jesus Christ's. As I, so you.

But how can this required of us be done ? Only, says

Christ, in another of His staggering comparisons, by gaining and living out My very spirit. "This is My commandment," not that you be honest or just, but "that you love one another, as I have loved you."

And we know how He loved; loved those who had no claim on Him, loved on and on in face of the most gross unworthiness and provocation, loved with a fulness that kept nothing back. Did He not choose, denying Himself all the comfortable ends and aims towards which we push, to give His life not for Himself but others? Did He not spend years in the hot heart of clamorous crowds shoving and thrusting to get near Him, all so greedy about their own needs, so insistent that their wants be met, but with never a thought for Him, though the disciples noticed with alarm how tired He often was, that all too evidently He was healing others at the price of His own strength. Did He not, day by day, lay down His life for any one in any want, and at last, having given all He had, give Himself too upon the Cross? To Christ, love is no little word to be bandied about thoughtlessly, but is packed with meaning and service and self-sacrifice. And we, too, are to live like that, to spend ourselves for others as He did, so to feel the sting of their troubles that we can't forget them, or keep out of them, and go our careless way (for what is it to us?), but have to share, to help, to save; feeling, as Butler said, that every one in sorrow has a right to our assistance, and that for those living on the Christian scale to give it is not charity but simple justice.

Such is Christ's dream for us. And this is what we are! How disappointed He must be. Like a mother who, all through his childhood, had such brave hopes for her boy, who has, with a sore heart, to watch the shabby thing he has become, shambling through his sorry life, so surely must Christ, who expected so much chivalry and generosity from us be hurt by what we are. Listen, for instance, to this clash of class and class rising on every side. Self-sacrifice, it seems, has grown an antiquated and discredited

virtue. Yet only out of that can one spin Christlikeness. Has it, too, become antiquated and discredited? If only we realized what He intends that we should be, if only we adopted His Cross for our footrule and measured men and sin and life and everything by that; if only in our trade disputes, our politics, our homes, we lived life in His way, how many sores we think inevitable would be healed, and how the sun would break through where the skies are grey and lowering, and what a happy place God's world would be—if we would ask ourself as the determining thing, Now what would Christ do here?—would throw away our outworn standards, and adopt the Christian one, "As I," "as I," "as I."

Most of us can remember an impressive analogy, a very vivid picture of how our Lord anticipated His example would inevitably tell on us. When, at the beginning of the war, Kitchener raised the first hundred thousand volunteers, every town's quota had a parade through the streets. It was a sight that moved one's very soul. They were so unlike soldiers, drawn from all classes—rich and poor—without arms or uniforms as yet, dressed in such queerly diverse ways, swinging along there proudly, alike only in this, that they were young and strong and winsome, that their country was in danger, and that they offered eagerly all they had and were and hoped to be for its defence. And as one watched, one's eyes filled and spilled over, and thereafter the thing haunted one and would not be forgotten. They told us that to leave our spiritual duties would be something like desertion. And for a while one tried to believe that. They scoffed, and said we were too old; and that did keep us quiet for a little. They pointed out that we were not all that we used to be, were certain to break down, and be a nuisance, not a help. But these young faces would rise up before us; and still every time we read the papers our uneasy hearts kept crying vehemently that if these boys were laying down their lives for us, it was intolerable to be skulking there in safety, till it came to this of it that we could not look God in the

eyes, and could not say our prayers, were quite sure that if we were to keep our self-respect—yes, if we were to save our souls, we, too, must go; that to take all that they were giving, and give nothing in our turn, was not thinkable, was impossible, choked us.

That was how Christ expected that the Cross and His whole mode of life would act on us—that we would not be able to accept that, and go on in our own selfish ways; to see it, and not feel that we, too, must adopt this as our standard. And so, indeed, it was in New Testament days. Again and again they argue in that very fashion, in those very words. If Christ, then we; as Christ, so I. Since He laid down His life for me, what can I do with mine except throw it away in the same generous fashion? Always the Cross is their standard of measurement: always they feel that what Christ is they, too, must grow to be; always they have the sense of Christ's eyes looking toward them confidently, and they dare not fail Him. "Vicarious suffering," says Dean Inge, "which on the individualistic theory seems so monstrous and unjust as to throw a shadow on the character of God, is easy to understand if we give up our individualism." And Christ assumes that in a Christian man and woman that is gone, and that they live not for themselves but Him, and in His way—as I.

And surely this new ideal, this higher test for life, this amazed realization of its possibilities that make us ashamed of being only what we are, are not the least of our Lord's gifts to us. It is because we live in a flat land that we never look up. Thomas Arnold, with his love of mountains, found it a real affliction to be dumped down on that monotony of sameness about Rugby, complained that he was in an evil plight. The first hills to the east, he wrote, are the Urals on the farther side of Russia! And there is many a life like that! There is never a rise in them to make folk lift their heads. It is all very well for Gladstone to tell his laddie to remember that life is not a mean thing to be shuffled

through anyhow, but a divine vocation. But it does not always seem like that, often appears petty and unexciting, and built on a small scale, this little whirl of commonplace nothings that make up our days. And we are apt to put them through anyhow, to think that this is well enough, will do; that it can't matter much whether we give our very best, or just our second best. Is it not dreadfully easy to live quite decently and kindly, but with never a touch of spiritual distinction? Is it not dreadfully difficult to do anything else? For we all corroborate each other in our mean ways. "Man," says Shakespeare, "is as the times are." And in truth we all do what is done, fall into step with those around us, are swept headlong by the currents of fashion and custom and thought, and rarely even dream of so much as attempting anything better.

That is why the appearance of a really good man is such a godsend to us. He makes us look up. He shows us what can be made of life. Face to face with him, our way of it looks squalid and uninviting and dull. But who does that for us like Jesus, or who flashes before us so ennobling an ideal as this Christ who measures our life by His Cross—ay, and compels us when we see it to adopt that as our standard too? When they asked Paul why he had thrown away his dreams and brilliant prospects, he replied that in Christ he had seen what life might be, had learned that its true use and glory is to spend it upon God and others; and since then the old hopes, that looked so glorious once, had lost for him their sheen and splendour, seemed now poor faded things like pearls that had gone dim. When, in a certain congregation, some people were touchy and on edge, fussing about little points of precedence, Peter did not argue with them, only set before them Christ in the upper room kneeling humbly before cantankerous people hot upon their rights, and that settled it. With that before them the dispute died out, became simply impossible. I have given you an example, said Christ; and they had to follow it. And we, too, know

that, with Christ's eyes upon us, we are bigger and better than we are elsewhere, that many things just cannot be done there in His presence. So long as the shadow of the Cross is on us, so long as we remember that our norm is Jesus, so long as we recall that we are meant to love as He loved us, and to use life as He used it, and to act as He would act, faults that are natural to us fall off from us and are left behind, become impossible, there upon Calvary—As I, as I, as I.

How, then, are we to gain this spirit of Christ till it becomes our settled mood ? For of ourselves we are painfully different —selfish and comfort-loving, and strangely little touched by the world's woes and sufferings and wrongs. Christ Himself tells us how in several of these astounding parallels of His. The thing, He says, is possible only by a far fuller and more intimate fellowship with Him than we have ever dreamed was even conceivable. Often He speaks in ways that show He must be grievously disappointed with the best we offer Him as being how cold and distant and official beside what He desires. " Ye call Me Master and Lord : and ye say well ; for so I am." And yet at times He lets us see that He wants something greatly warmer than mere service. " Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends," He says, adding that He has opened His whole heart to us in utter frankness, trusting us absolutely, keeping back nothing, and looks for a like fellowship as free and full upon our side. Or, once they interrupted Him, telling Him that His own people wished to see Him. And He looked round and said that every one who does God's will is His mother and sister and brother. He wants to get as close to you as that ; to look at you with a son's proud affection. He wishes you to get as close to Him as that, to give Him a place in your heart as big as that a mother gives her boy ; wants you to be as keen about His interests and plans and aims, to be as wholly one with Him as they are perfectly united. It is love that is the fulfilling of the law. And if, as Newman says, " Our obedience springs from

some source short of love," a feeling of duty and the like, our standard of things is all wrong, and the offering we think quite striking is really an insult gross in its insufficiency. Service for masters, and duty for pay, but Christ claims the whole passion of our hearts.

But, in particular, there is one very startling passage that leaves one gasping. Our Lord is talking of the shepherd and the sheep, and of the perfect understanding that there is between them, he with his skill and knowledge of their individual ways, they that have learned from long experience to trust Him implicitly. Such perfect sympathy and knowledge of each other, He declares, is there between Me and My people ; I know them, and they know Me. And then He adds, " As I know the Father, and as the Father knows Me," a saying so dazzling that our eyes are darkened by it, and we feel gropingly with blind hands like Paul when he was struck down yonder upon the Damascus road. For think of the absolute understanding, the utter unison, the closeness of communion, the perfect unity, between Christ and God. And in some kind of a way He dares to take that as the standard of the fellowship which He desires between us and Himself ! As I and God, so you and Me. There is a standard for you ! And He expects that from us, that we will dwell with Him and brood upon Him, and absorb Him, as He did day after day with God ; that we will slip away to Him whenever a chance opens in the press of things, as He in any leisure moment loved to make a retreat in God ; that we will let His influence keep playing on us, fashioning, moulding, changing us, as He Himself habitually dwelt in His Father's presence, and spoke to Him, not as if He were far away, but to One there. As I and God, so you and Me.

Little wonder we are making little of things, if this is what the faith is meant to be. For we do not know Christ like that, are not so dwelling with Him. In these rushed days have we not largely lost the art of quiet altogether ? Is

not prayer being jostled from our flurried minds, that seem to have no time for it ? How much are you alone with Jesus Christ ? And what resemblance is there in our fellowship with Him to that clinging of the branch to the vine that gives it everything, even the power to cling. What Christ asks of us is that we will so dwell with Him, that even when our mind is full of other things, unconsciously the thought of Him will be our standard in everything we think or say or do ; His voice break in on us, so that we can't forget it.

> " Where'er my footsteps turned,
> Her voice was like a hidden bird that sang.
> The thought of her was like a flash of light,
> Or an unseen companionship, a breath
> Of fragrance, independent of the wind,"

blowing up even against the storms, says Wordsworth, of the great influence of his life. And so it ought to be with Christians. As Christ with God, so we with Him.

That, then, is what is wrong with us. We don't live close enough to Jesus Christ. We can forget Him. That sounds impossible. And yet we can forget Him. Anatole France has a marvellous story in which two elderly Romans are recounting tales of their loose youth in Palestine long years before. One is recalling a certain pretty woman he had known, and ends by saying that she faded out of their company. I heard, he adds, that she had joined herself to a wandering teacher of those parts and times. Jesus, I think, His name was, from a place called Nazareth, was it ? By the way, didn't you condemn Him for something or other ? Do you remember Him, Pontius ? Whereat Pilate, knitting his brows like one wading in the deeps of memory, thought for a while, and then said slowly, " Jesus ! Jesus of Nazareth ! No. I can't recall the man."

And we, too, can forget Christ, and we often do. In a temptation, when some choice has to be made, when something irritating vexes us, if we remembered we were in His

presence, and that He is the standard, all would be how well. But our minds are full of other things, and we never recall Him till it is too late. That is the reason, is it not ? If we can fall with His eyes full upon us, that is the sin of Judas ; and we, too, are perilously near to being a lost soul. But surely it is rather Peter's case, when he, poor soul, scared and flustered, thinking only of his own safety, forgot Christ, and made a hideous mess of things, till, through the figures crowding menacingly round him, he caught sight of His Lord's sad eyes fastened on him in sorrow ; and with that the horror of it rushed on him, and his heart broke. And so long afterwards he says to us with confidence, believe me that if things are going badly with you, you can't be remembering. Get closer to Christ, live near Him, and it will become impossible to fail Him.

Trivial and worldly, fretted and small, we must take time to sink ourselves deep down into the healing coolness of His presence, must let His mind and character influence and infect us, must often, far oftener than we do, visit Calvary and soak our natures in the spirit of that scene, must take that as our standard, and apply it everywhere. As I, says Christ, so you. That is the rule that ought to settle matters for us at a glance. That is the touchstone by which we are to be tried. The Last Assizes will be held on Calvary. It is against the background of the Cross you and I shall be judged. And only those who have used life in Christ's way, and to grow like Christ, will He acknowledge to be really His.

XVII

THE INSTINCT FOR WHAT IS VITAL

"Enabling you to have a sense of what is vital."—PHIL. i. 9 (Moffatt).

"With a sense of what is vital in religion."—ROM. ii. 18.

WHEN you come to think of it, to have the instinct for what is vital is no bad definition of what constitutes success. What is it that gives distinction in art, literature, teaching, any sphere you like, that raises one here and one there out of the ruck of their hot, perspiring rivals who, with all their eager bustle, never come to anything particular, but remain drably ordinary and tamely ineffective? Does it not very largely come to this that, while these latter dissipate their energies in a multitude of rather futile busynesses that have, and can have, no large or striking results, the fortunate few have the instinct for what is vital, the faculty of seeing almost at a glance what matters or does not, and make their way unerringly through the mass of irrelevancies among which the others lose themselves, straight to what really counts and tells.

That holds good everywhere. For, as the natural laws, gravity and the like, simply ignore those boundaries which we choose to set up between nation and nation, and act as certainly among the barbarous peoples of Central Africa as in London, so all life, in every department of it, is ruled by the same laws. Think it out, and you will see that, in essence, it is the same spirit required to win a football match that is needed to make a saint of God—the same grit and determina-

tion, the same big-heartedness under disaster, the same unselfishness, the same ability to make an opportunity and seize an opening. It may be questionable as exegesis, but it is certainly true to the facts of life, boldly to translate our Lord's saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a business man," and proceed to point out that we would make more progress in things spiritual if, there too, we introduced a little business method, some thoroughness, and honest work, some foresight, some capacity to learn from experience, some willingness to abandon what we have found is not profitable, and to develop what we have discovered is; if we understood that religion, too, is not just a hobby to which we can turn at odd moments when there is not much else to do, but a life-work demanding not only hard, daily toil, but real skill and capacity which we must have, or must acquire. There are many people, says Paul, who potter at religion, but make little or nothing of it; because they miss the whole point of the thing, have no instinct for what is vital.

And when we look at the history of the Church, at the reckless fashion in which we have squandered our strength and time in fratricidal struggles between sect and sect, in embittered bickerings over matters often of secondary moment, while the world about us lies unwon, and the Church's great commission remains plainly unfulfilled, surely we can understand that outburst of Erasmus when he cried that he wished that we would cease from our disputings altogether, and put all that energy and zeal that we are wasting upon them into the carrying of the gospel to the heathen! Or recall the infinite pains that have been taken down the centuries to preserve minute orthodoxy in all points of mental belief, while ugly evils flaunt along the streets, and are accepted meekly as part of the make-up of things! Or recollect how easy it is to assume that we ourselves are Christian people! Why? Oh well, just the usual reasons! We say our prayers, when we are not too sleepy; and we come to church when there is nothing much

to do ; and we give a little ; so, of course, there is no doubt of it although our tempers may remain uncurbed, and our characters are not the least like Jesus Christ's, nor growing any nearer it ! Do we not need that solemn warning that Christ gives us when He tells us bluntly that many people lose their lives and souls, because they are always laying the emphasis and stress on the wrong points, keep running about breathlessly doing things, and quite good things at that, in their own subordinate way ; yet the main things are left undone. So long as that is so, says Paul, so long as you have no sense of proportion, and no accurate standard of measurement, don't see that this is a little matter, and treat it as a secondary thing, and that that is a big thing, and must be set in a first place ; so long as you have no instinct for what is vital, you are sure to make a bungle of your life, and muddle it badly. For, living a life is like building a house. You have only a certain space with which to work ; and everything depends on what you do with it. If you squander it in long and draughty passages, and leave only a bunk for a dining-room, and closets for bedrooms ; if, as the women wail, you forget all about the pantries and the keeping-places—well, then, you fail. And when God comes and looks at your life, might He not say : But you have left out everything that matters—have wasted your space sadly ; this character that you have built is little use to Me. We must get down to the essential things, and concentrate on them, must have the knack of knowing what is vital.

That seems to me common sense. And if it is so, then the point for you and me is, What is vital ? What says the New Testament ?

Well, to begin, if you are to come through the wild weather you are certain to meet before your voyage is over, you must have a working theory of things, a reasonable reading of this difficult world of ours, of the slaps of fate, buffets of fortune, inscrutable providences call them what

you will, that are certain to befall us all before the end. It is too late to insure your house when it is already ablaze. It is vital, says the Testament, that you have some solution of these things ready for use over against the day when on you, too, they will leap out ; or else you are likely to collapse in a snarling cynicism, or a weakly whimpering, or a child's snivel that it isn't fair !

At present, indeed, you may feel no pressing need for that. For yours so far is summer weather, and your path lies in sunshine, and these rumours of tragic things come blown to you as from an infinitely distant world ; like news of a disaster somewhere in the heart of China, from which we turn, looking for something in the paper that concerns us and has human interest. Life to you is a good gift, rich and full and crowded with interest ; and you enjoy every moment of it. And you do right. Joy is a very worshipful thing. After all the benefits that He has heaped upon you, it is surely the least that you can do to bring to God a glad face and a happy spirit.

The Testament is the sanest and the healthiest of books. It never rails at life. To these people, too, it is a good thing, to be met with brave eyes and with sunny, thankful hearts. Read the literature of Russia, and life seems an intolerably stale stupidity, boring and depressing beyond words. It is as if closely immured in the dull street of some appalling factory town, with never a touch of colour or of greenness to relieve eyes wearied by the eternal squalor everywhere, one was condemned to yawn and toss and fret through long days of grey mist and dripping weather, with rain blobs running down the window panes, and rain puddles growing into large pools in the muddy road, and cold rain soaking deep into one's very shivering soul, till one feels fiercely that God owes us an apology for setting us down in this ghastly thing at all. There is no touch of that in the New Testament, which can think of no prize bigger and better than an eternity of life, cleansed certainly from many

things that vex us here—still life. Only it never tries to hide that these grim facts are facts, are always facts, and always dreadfully real for some folk. And one day or other they must become so for you.

Nothing is more striking in the Gospels than the way in which crowds gather in a moment out of nowhere. And when you move among them, how many of them are hurt and ailing and broken and desperate. Had you and I passed through these sleepy little towns, lying there basking drowsily in the hot sunshine all along the edge of the blue waters of the lake, we would have looked at them a little wistfully, no doubt. Ah, well, if I, too, could escape out of the dust and whirl and din of life, and settle down in such a peaceful little nook as this, I, too, might perhaps make something of my soul! For here, where you can hear the silence, there is nothing at all to vex or harry or disturb, only the heavy stillness of an utter peace and healing quiet.

Yet, when Christ came, out from beneath these drowsing roofs came such torn lives, such breaking hearts, such spent and tired and ailing souls; hurt, they too, almost past the bearing by the dark, inscrutable mysteries of life. And that is a true picture of this sunny earth of ours.

The mass of trouble in a congregation is past all believing. You look about you, and see only quiet eyes and placid faces. But do not be deceived by the courage of your fellow-men and women! Here to-day, quite close to you, there are stunned minds looking out ahead without a notion how they are to struggle through, and hearts so sore it is all but unbearable, and souls tired and tried and tempted come to fling themselves on God, as their one chance. And to you also it will come one day. You, too, will stand stunned, staring at the bottom suddenly dropped out of life—your life; will see the doctor shake his head, and hear him say that you, or else one of your dear ones, have some dire disease, and there is nothing for it but some months of agony, and then the inevitable too slow end; will waken to find that some frost of disappointment

has made all your blossoms, so glorious only yesterday, a mass of withered brown; will hear your footsteps echoing drearily in a wacsome loneliness; and home itself have grown an empty place! And when it comes, what then? Is it to be allowed to break, to crush, to harden you? Is your easy faith, that has never been tried as yet, to die away in a whine of querulous peevishness? Are you to fling religion from you, in a fit of childish exasperation, crying, Love! and how can God be love in face of brutal facts like these? Will we let ourselves grow soured and cankered, that dreary thing, from which every one slips away, a man nursing a bitter grievance against life? It is vital, say the Scriptures, that you think out in time some solution of it all that will enable you to face it when it comes, as come it surely must, with your head up, and a heart, sore indeed, but unconquered, indomitable, unafraid. Didon's mother died in a dreadful agony of months that wrung her son's very soul. "I was hoping," he wrote, "that the last years of her life would be spared from suffering. But I was thinking of her with a son's love. God's love has decided otherwise, and I believe in God's love."

So pressing is the need that many hold that all God's prophets are raised up to meet us here. "The aim and end of all the religions," said Goethe, "is to help men to meet the inevitable." Certainly, all the thinkers hurry to our help. But nobody can steady us like Jesus Christ. Partly because we feel He has the right to speak, because we know that He is not one of those fireside strategists who drove us frantic in the war, who, lolling back among their soft cushions, and setting their slippered feet cosily on the fender, railed at the troops because they were not advancing faster, troops ankle-deep in mud, and holding on somehow where nobody could hold. There is nothing of that in Christ. The gospel comes to us out of the darkness round the Cross, is given us by One who Himself faced the howling of life's tempests at their wildest. And to Him we will listen. Ay, and what

a glorious reading of it all He gives, as bracing as the clean air from God's hills, keeping us brave and manly and undaunted. If it be true that, as He says, this life of ours is an education for some task either here or later; that it is not really cruel even when it hurts intolerably; that it is not chance-blown; that there is meaning in it, though we can see none; and love in it, though assuredly it does not look like love; and honour in it, for God is treating us as He did Jesus Christ, making us, too, perfect through discipline and suffering, endowing us with such courage and sympathy and understanding and character as will enable us to be serviceable to Him and to our fellows; ah then, even if it is sore, we can make shift to see it through. "I don't say," admits Seneca, "that we like these things, but we can change all of them into a glory." And James of Harvard, asking what religion does for one, makes answer, that among other things "It gives a splendour to what must be borne in any case." The Cross had to be faced—that ugly, squalid, horrible fact. But the way in which Christ met it, transformed it into the crowning glory of the world. And so it is, in measure, with all those ills and troubles that come to you and me. They have got to be faced in any case. But religion can ennoble them; or rather through them we can win nobility.

But, after all, it's just a theory, you protest; only one reading of facts that can be viewed very differently. No doubt of that. We walk by faith. It is only a theory. But then, as Browning put it, if there is a theory to which masses of facts point me, and which enables me to face life in a big and stout and gallant way, would I not be a fool to throw it from me for another theory not so likely, though certain facts do seem to point in its direction, which leaves me crushed and weak and whining?

Yes, and as James of Harvard says again, very often it is only belief in an uncertified result that makes that come true. Did not Kelvin say that he had never reasoned his way through to any discovery; that he amassed his facts,

and then leapt out into the dark, and landed safe. So, says James, often in life what we have got to do is "to believe what is in the line of our needs, for only by such belief is the need fulfilled. Refuse to believe, and you shall indeed be right, for you shall irretrievably perish. But believe, and again you shall be right, for you shall save yourself." Believe in what is in the line of your needs! Put out your hand, and feel for God, on the assumption that you have a Father there, you who so need a Father; and you will feel His hand close over yours. Trust Him even where it is all quite dark to you, and He will bring you through, will make you surer and surer, till you, too, will say—I don't believe, I know.

It is vital that you have some reading of things to help and hearten you. For, as Bridges has it, a day will come "when you will have to gather your faith together, and your strength make stronger." But if you have no faith, what then? Are you not certain to break down in cynicism, or in weakness, or in things yet worse? It is vital, say the Scriptures, with all earnestness.

And then, if you are to live your life aright, you must have a high enough conception of it, must range in their real order of relative importance the various ends and aims to which you can put it, and choose wisely between them. That is not easy. Many rob God of what they could give Him, of what they are here expressly to give Him, through an undue diffidence that looks contemptuously at its little store of seventy years, and the dull routine of trivial things in which they must be spent, as at a coin so small that it is not worth offering. That, says Christ, is a very common sin of ordinary people with no special aptitudes or gifts. While cleverer, happier, more amply endowed folk are apt to become confused by God's very liberality toward them. Life is so full and appetizing and enjoyable that—are there better things than these?—well, these are good enough for me, they say, and seek for nothing more—forget they are not denizens of time, but made for eternity; great creatures,

with a great life, which they ought to use greatly ; fritter it away in a little flutter of pleasure, in a round of they themselves could scarcely tell you what, in just nothing at all. It is vital, say the Scriptures, that you think of your life worthily.

Present-day novelists, as a class, will have it that it is little better than a vulgar squabble of ugly passions ; and that what one really needs as one's equipment for success is to develop one's selfishness and self-indulgence, one's teeth and claws, and so bite one's way through to what one wants. But look at Jesus Christ, and His wonderful reading of it all. He takes that little life of yours into His hand, and, as He looks at it, His eyes grow full of a great awe. There has never been a time, He says, when God was not thinking of this, planning for it, working towards it. Immensities and eternities and endless æons of divine power have gone to the fashioning of it. And now that it is here, are you to throw it away on some poor tawdry ambition or narrow dream of your own comfort ? That won't think, He says ; is surely not conceivable. You are not made to nose and grunt and gobble round the swine troughs, shoving and pushing for what you can get. You have been built on lines too big for that—must put your life to larger ends.

It is not only a question of the eternal as against the temporal : of immortality or this brief flash of life ! Though a lad at the university who, arguing that he can't be sure whether he will really live on after undergraduate days—who knows, who can say definitely ?—and because of that doubt squanders all his time and strength and health in a wild riot of foolishnesses till, his four or five years quickly over, he stands facing the beggarly life to which he has condemned himself—would you not call him an outrageous fool ? But what word is colossal enough to describe the imbecility of one who lives only for this atom of time vouchsafed us here, and goes his way unqualified to face a maimed eternity ? Still, it is not merely a question of the temporal and the

eternal. "There may be heaven," says Browning, "there must be hell, meantime there is this earth here." Yes, there is this life here. And long or brief, what are you going to do with it? You will have many claimants clamouring for your patronage, and all of them have something to say. He might, says Scripture, have "enjoyed the pleasures of sin for a season." For sin does have its pleasures, of a kind, and for a season. Selfishness will shout the loudest, telling you that it is your own life, and you should spend it on yourself. The world will have its gifts to offer you—real gifts, though very fleeting. And yet before you close with anything they have to give or say, study the records of those who have been most avid in their service of such lords, and you will see with your own eyes that if the wages of sin is death, those of the world are boredom and satiety and a too tardy recognition that these hearts of ours are far too stately and too spacious to be filled with such poor prizes, which, heap them up how you will, still leave them empty, hollow, echoing.

"It's no' in titles, nor in rank,
It's no' in wealth like Lunnon bank,
To purchase peace and rest.
It's no' in making muckle mair,
It's no' in books, it's no' in lear,
To mak' us truly blest.
Nae pleasures nor treasures
Can mak' us happy lang,
The heart's aye the part aye
That mak's us right or wrang."

Before you decide, listen to the New Testament. Would you not like to live like this? it says, and shows us Jesus Christ. And we do know that that is life lived as it ought to be, life at its biggest and its highest; do see that what we ought to do with it is not to spend it on ourselves, but to give it for others, in the lavish way He did; do understand that, for real success, we must escape from the boorish and uncouth provincialism of selfishness, and learn the court fashions of eternity, and model our life upon that of the

great God who has no thought of self at all. Heine tells us that whenever he read Plutarch he was filled with a desire to leap on a swift horse, and gallop to Berlin, and fling himself into life, and become a hero too. And when we look at Jesus Christ, do we not feel the thrill and glamour of that glorious life to which He leads ? Or is our face unlighted, are our eyes quite dull, and do they stray uninterestedly from everything Christ has to offer back to the poor, dusty nothings of the world ? There was once an embassage that carried to a barbarous people the best gifts civilization could bestow. And they looked coldly at them all. Pictures meant nothing to them ; precious stones had no value in their eyes ; gold, what did it mean ? A bit of turkey red cloth now, that would have been a gift worth winning ! But their eyes, roaming discontentedly across all the heaped splendours, could see not a scrap of that ! And you can turn from Jesus Christ, coveting rather your red rags, preferring them to all the gold of Ophir and the wealth untold there is for you in Him ! It is vital, say the Scriptures, that we have a high enough conception of our life, and pay it down only for something that is really worthy of it.

And, further, if by the grace of God you have come upon your day-dreams in Christ, then it is vital that you find some power that will enable you to work them out. For, of yourself, you can't. These hearts of ours are so frail and so stumbling : the quest is so long and so hard : there are so many things to drag us back and haul us down : in our own soul there is a discord and a tumult, part leaping forward, and part hanging back, like that weird conflict of which Shelley dreamed between an eagle and a snake coiled round it, when at one moment the triumphing bird was almost lost to sight far in the heights of heaven ; and at another, half choked, it was beating the very dust of earth with futile wings ; and in the end it was the snake that won. We see, but we can't reach : we know what we should be and do, but it will not work out. And mere ideals are cold comfort, insubstantial

fare : are apt to leave in us only a soreness and an ache of baffled disappointment, like Peer Gynt, hesitating, compromising, baffled, futile :

> "Ay, think of it—wish it done, will it to boot,
> But do it—no! that's past my understanding."

If all that Christ can do for us is to show how glorious a thing a human life can be, while leaving us ourselves unchanged, His gift to us is like to be, not peace, but the long stinging of an unhealed wound of passionate regret and futile yearning. A self-taught dauber in some village, who has never seen a real picture, may derive a certain satisfaction from his own crude work, just because ignorant of how crude it is. But take him to an exhibition of the masters, and he may throw his brushes from him in despair. So Dostoieffsky confessed sadly that the nobility he felt within himself had never been of any value to him, had only tormented him with a sense of its uselessness. For I have never been able to do anything with it, so he says. And what can an ideal that you cannot reach do for you except madden you ?

Surely you don't mean that ? For my part, I would have my dreams and hopes and longings, although nothing ever came of them. Did not God tell a man whose plans had never grown to anything at all, "Because it was in thine heart, thou didst well" ? "All I could never be, all men ignored in me, that was I worth to God." So, at least, the Testament keeps telling us. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst," so it maintains, "for a righteousness they have not got." Blessed, ay, but why ? Because they will be filled. All that high-sounding talk of Lessing and Stevenson about choosing the quest rather than the attainment, and the journey rather than the arriving, sounds big and valiant and athletic. But, really, it is silly. Surely one wants to get on with one's job : to feel his hand upon the goal ! Yes, and you can, says the New Testament, with absolute assurance. For Christ gives us, not an ideal only, but the power to work it out.

And it does work! These staggering promises and prayers and hopes of the Epistles are not just valorous words thrown up into the air. But at the end of each of them, written with Paul's own hands, one comes on this : " This also is experience " : this I myself have proved : if I am sure Christ can avail for you in this stupendous way, in the most hopeless situations, it is because He has availed for me, when hope seemed out, and all looked over. You cannot, he says, have too lofty expectations. Whatever your need be, He will meet that ; however huge your hopes, He will prove vastly better than the best of them. You can't stand fast in your temptations ? Well, we can ! You are baffled and thwarted and beaten by the difficulties of your life ? We also used to be like that, but it is not so now, not since we came on Jesus Christ. And for you, too, He will avail. It is vital that you have a power to do in you what, in yourself, you cannot do, as you yourself have learned. And that power we have found and proved in Christ, and you can share it, if you will.

How does it work, this wonderful thing ? There is no mystery about that. Every man (is it not so ?) does what he likes : not necessarily what his self-interest advises, or even what he ought, but what he likes. To change him you must change his likings, must somehow introduce into his life something that he prefers to the old foolish loves that were dragging him down. And thus our problem is to get our likings won for the deep central things. Duty may be cold, abstract, official. But change it to a personal affection, and we shall choose it every time. A mother can do impossible things, can sit up incredible hours, when her little one is ill. For, then, duty is not merely duty, it is love. And love can do anything. Well, that is the secret of Christianity. Live close to Jesus Christ, advises the New Testament, watch Him spending Himself for others, dying for us upon the Tree, and you will need to love One who has first so loved, will find your heart is being stolen away by Him from

all those other things that held it in so tight and fast a grip, that what had always been impossible has become easy, inevitable, a thing of course. For now it is not duty merely by which you are prompted, but an overmastering affection. And, face to face with Christ, you could not do now what you used to choose time after time, though conscience warned, and your own heart revolted, and you knew it was unworthy. For now your likings have been changed : this Friend of yours has made another man of you : and therefore you can stand fast where you always fell, and win where every time for years you had been heavily thrown.

It is vital, cry the Scriptures, that men puzzled, tempted, falling, hopeless, should be given some power to help them to be what they know that they should be. And here in Christ it is.

Why, then, not try it here and now ? Let us go out to Calvary together, and standing there in the thick darkness, let us gaze up, awed and silent, at Him whom we have pierced. This is where far the mightiest spiritual wonders of the world have taken place ; that very spot where you are now is where how many souls have really found what you are seeking ! Stand still and look a little longer. Surely you, too, feel the thrill of it, the shrinking horror that sins, your sins, should hurt God like this, and a new passion in your heart against them, and a queer, happy, exultant feeling that in the future it is not going to be what it has been too tragically often in the past; but that you also have found everything you, too, can need in Him who loves you, who loves you like this.

XVIII

OUR PART IN OUR SALVATION

"Indeed the whole of the crowd made efforts to touch Him: for power issued from Him, and cured everybody."—LUKE vi. 19 (Moffatt).

THIS is the crowded record of a wonderful day, the fruits of which were seen for years and years in many a home from which a cold, dark shadow always glooming over it, or always creeping nearer, had been lifted; in many an ailing life grown whole and well again; in many a soul from which the tire was gone, and that went singing happily through tasks that had for long enough been cruel burdens, almost more than they could bear. That, then, is what happens when Christ is given His chance with men and women, let their needs be what they may; what ought, in some real sense, to take place still whenever we gather together in His presence and His house. And if there is small sign of that, then there is something wrong; and it must be upon our side. To believe, to kneel in prayer, to go to church ought normally to be a great event, with large results. Yet, as a rule, how little comes of it, compared to what might be, what indeed we are definitely promised. Why? Christ's willingness and power are proved. But are we playing our part, doing what even He cannot do for us, what must, Christ or no Christ, rest with us?

When it was noised abroad that He was on His way to any village, a wild new hope must have burst into sudden flame in many a heart. For months the most amazing rumours had been blowing in on every wind, telling how,

here and there and yonder, wherever indeed Christ was, the blind were seeing, and the stone deaf hearing just as well as any one ; how wonderful things, surely far too good to be true in this workaday, dusty world of drab realities, were actually happening. Some, of course, scoffed the whole story out of court as on the face of it impossible. Such things, they said, were certainly pretty fancies ; only they don't get done, not really, not in the grey sober prose of actual life. Many, no doubt, did not know what to think or make of it. But the majority felt burningly there might be something in it. Who knew, they argued, who at least could be sure ? And, half staggered, but half crediting it all, they wondered wistfully, and talked of it at the street corners, and dared to dream and hope.

And now Christ was upon the road to them, this very Christ of whom such glories were alleged so confidently ! He might be here at any moment now : and they could test it for themselves ! And ah, if it were really true ! What an incredible difference it would make ! And what a warmth of golden sunshine would flood many a bleak and wintry life ! Here, perhaps, was a man who had spent everything he had, seeking to cure his wife, poor soul. And she was no whit better, rather worse : and they knew nothing further could be done. There was a woman who would throw away blindly everything that she possessed, and never think of it again, if only her laddie might be like the healthy boys shouting so happily at their tireless games out on the street, while he lay there so wan and white and weary. But she had understood only too well for years that that could never be, that the last hope was out, that she must bear the stabbing pain of it on to the very end. But was it out, now that this wonderful Christ was drawing near ? The very doubt was a delight. There was a singing in her long, dumb heart ; and the old light was in her eyes the neighbours had not seen for years. Surely there must have been a bustle of happy excitement everywhere, as they carried out their sick and

frail, and laid them all along the roadside where He could not fail to see them ; as they remembered an old soul who lived alone, and ran back for her, that she, too, might share in it ; as they stood clustered there, lining the way, their heads all turned in the one direction, that from which Christ must come, all eager, hopeful, thrilled. And then a little rustle would surge along the waiting rows. He was in sight, would be here in a moment now, had come ; was stopping opposite their dear ones, and was asking them, " What will you I should do for you ? " With Christ there came into their lives a strange, new, glorious, immense hope.

But here it was no village merely. People had found their way to Him from north and south, and east and west, and, in particular, from that whole countryside. That morning had broken just like any other. And many a poor creature, the weary restlessness and tossing of the long night at last over, was looking out on a hot, tiring day of the familiar pain, when the news came. Here was a chance they dare not miss. And in a little a long line of ailing things were making their slow difficult way towards Christ, with every lane they passed adding its quota of the ill and maimed ; and slowly that grey tide of all the suffering of a wide district crept to Christ's feet ; and it all happened as they hoped ; and that night in how many homes groups of bewildered people, stunned by sheer gladness, gave praise to God with hearts that even yet could scarcely credit it was really true. That is what happens, then, wherever Christ is given His chance.

And yet elsewhere it was not always so. There, too, there were the same pathetic crowds, and the same clamant needs, and the same eager Christ. And yet there He was largely baffled, and His presence made next to no difference at all. But that night, just like any other night, there was the crying of sick children, and lights burning on and on till the dawn came where anxious folk were watching beside dear ones, and frail sufferers just as frail and suffering as yesterday.

Christ was the same, but He was faced by quite a different

mood. For here there was nothing of that expectancy, of minds standing on tiptoe watching for what they felt breathlessly must come. But people simply drifted out to see the man of the hour whom chance had brought into their midst, with never a thought that anything would really happen. "My dear fellow," they said, "I'm not bigoted, but, believe me, it's mere empty talk with nothing in it. He lived quite near to me for years and years. He mended that very chair on which you are sitting now. Oh, certainly a good man, and a most kindly neighbour, but miracles—not He! I know Him, and have known Him all His life; and there is nothing in it but exaggeration and excitement." And that night they could say, "Well, was I not entirely justified in all I said? There were no miracles here, you must admit. Yet we were there, and needy folk in plenty; and if He could do anything, surely it would have been for us, His own old townsmen! You've seen for yourself it's just a stupid rumour with no substance in it whatsoever, as I said." And the Gospels concede with utter frankness that there were places where Jesus could do little. He did heal a few sick folk, we read, but there was nothing notable. For there He could do no mighty works, because of their unbelief.

There, surely, is an awesome fact. For here are we today, how many of us needy and spent, heartsore and soul-sick, desperately needing Christ; and He is in the midst of us, the wonderful Christ, with grace for every need and strength for every weakness, eager to give His very best to all of us. And yet, largely, it rests with us whether much comes of it or not. And we can't shuffle off that grave responsibility.

Actual experience of Him, indeed, makes one learn more and more how foolish it is to set any limits to what Christ can do. He is a mighty Saviour; and He has a gracious way of breaking through His own conditions, of finding means to help us even when we fail Him; gives how abundantly even when we don't ask; and when we have not interest enough to

seek Him, seeks for us. Still, the conditions are there, and set out by Himself; and, be sure, not for nothing. Even Christ can't always help, unless we are prepared to carry through our part in our salvation: and such a part in it there is.

True, it is never earned, and can't be earned; is far too big a thing for that, must be accepted as a gift; as is the case with everything that really counts or matters. Who earns his life, his health, his friends? And this, too, is a thing of grace, is given for nothing. None the less, there are conditions. "Ask," says Christ, "and you shall receive: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And we have no right to assume that God is so gracious that He will somehow make it all the same though we don't ask and seek and knock; that we needn't take that seriously.

When that father, desperate over the disciples' failure with his unhappy boy, with all the brave hopes that had so buoyed him gone again, seeing Christ, ran to Him as to a last chance, with that lamentable cry, "Lord, if Thou canst do anything!" Christ pulled him up at once. "If!" He said—"if! I am willing, and eager, yes, and wholly able, in certain conditions; but you must grant Me these; and thus everything depends, not on Me, but on you. If! 'All things are possible to him that believeth'"; and, so saying, He threw back the whole responsibility on him. And we cannot avoid it.

And yet how do we face it, you and I? What actual substance is there in our claim that we believe in Christ's ability to help us? Do we really credit and expect it where for us the crux lies, where in our case it must be proved; there and here and yonder where we ourselves have always been so unsuccessful; yet where Christ must avail, or else, however marvellous He be, He is no Saviour, for us? When we came to-day into His presence, was it with the happy feeling that we had got to the end of our trouble now that He was here, or at least that we were going back to face it, not tired and faint-hearted any more, but brave and strong again, and well able to see it through; sure that He is going to-day to

succour us where we are tempted ; and to make us efficient where we have nearly always failed ; and to give us the victory where life has been one long uneasiness and misery of being raided by strong sins we can't resist ; sure, in short, that Christ is really going to make all the needed difference for us, and so with something of that same eager buzz of pleasant excitement in our hearts that these expectant folk felt long ago. When Christ is given that, it still works out ; and wonders happen now as then. In the right atmosphere no one is disappointed. In that great crowd you note He healed them all, and there were no exceptions.

No one drew nearer and nearer to Him with a heart beating ever quicker as the people between him and Jesus thinned away, all of them cured ; with a faith growing ever stronger and yet more exultant as he watched impossible cases really healed ; and, yet when at last his turn had come, and he stood face to face with Christ, saw His eyes cloud, and heard Him saying sadly, "Ah no, I can do nothing for you!" And with that the unhappy soul had to go hirpling home again just as he came, his pain made all the sorer by that universal happiness around him. That never happens, declares the New Testament, with positive assurance—never, never! Out of our own experiences we can promise you that. This is a Saviour who saves to the uttermost, and who is able to meet every possible call upon Him. And so when you go hence it ought to be, and can be, not just as you came, but with the powers you lack really yours at last. When you find yourself back in the customary place, faced by the usual difficulties, it need not vanish like a dream, and the dull earth rush in on you again. This thing is real, is real for you ; and you can prove it so. In all that mass of sufferers, He healed every one, we read. And He can heal you, too.

Only in that wild, seething, excited mob, have you noticed that there seems to have been something of a struggle to get to Christ ? The weaklings must have been sadly jostled,

often disappointed, ruthlessly thrust back by stronger folk made selfish in their eagerness to find what they themselves were seeking. Yet in the end every one reached Christ; because flung back and pushed about, breathless and crushed and hurt, as they might be, they were not to be deterred, but doggedly fought their way in again, and did win their hard way to Him at last. "They were all struggling to touch Him." And if we are really to reach Christ, we too will need to struggle to get near Him.

For one thing, it is not easy, is it, to believe that He can really help us? Once it was possible, perhaps, but it's not likely now. Our ways are so set, our habits are so fixed, we have become so accustomed to be this we are, and it no longer hurts us much. In any case, for good and evil, this is actually what we are, and we don't look for any marked change now. And accordingly the great news of the gospel blows somewhat idly through our mind. We don't challenge its truth, nor doubt it in the least. For we have seen it working out in other lives. But we are not surprised that it seems to do little in our case. We never really thought it would. How can it, with our characters so gnarled and strong?

Or our past failures have disheartened us. For how often at a communion, or elsewhere, we have been really moved, and swore hot vows of very definite amendment. And then somehow it dropped out of our mind, and we slipped back into the customary ways; and so time after time it fizzled out in a mere resultless emotion.

Petrarch had a master, a man of real genius, so we gather, who made nothing of his talents because of a certain inertia and sluggishness of mind that he could never overcome. He dreamed great dreams, and planned large plans, often rose up intent on starting to them there and then, would actually begin, would write the title-page of some great work to be in a fair hand, with lovely curves and flourishes, and sometimes managed as far as the preface, setting down purposefully all that he was going to do. But there it

always ended! And so in great degree it has been with us too. Our lives are full of loose leaves blowing about; title-pages without any volumes, and prefaces with never even a first chapter. Always we are just about really to set to work to make adequate use of this wonderful Christ; often we tell God how determined we are to begin, are starting now. And we do mean it all; yet with us, too, it usually gets no further. And that repeated experience has made us chary of vowing any longer. Is it honest to make promises now that we have learned we cannot keep them? Yes, you will have to struggle and push hard if you are to break through to Jesus Christ, and really use all that there is in Him for you.

Coleridge found that, and tells us in dramatic words how his conscience often tried to thrust him back. You! it cried angrily, to force your way into the presence of the King—you! This is sheer insolence. Begone! And how he would not be repulsed, but stubbornly pushed and fought through all the mass of things that would have hectoringly thrown him out, crying from afar, "I appeal to Cæsar," raising his bound hands in passionate appeal, refusing to be kept from his one hope. I struggle in to Christ, he says.

And you and I may have to struggle too, through apathy and doubt, and a sordid contentment with things as they are, and many another hindrance. Still push you in, like that blind man refusing to be silenced, crying and crying out there on the far edge of the crowd—a perfectly hopeless position, you and I would have said—and elbowing a way where there was no way, nearer and nearer Christ: or like that woman, caught there in the press, and swept helplessly to and fro by its surging rushes, now with her hope alight, for she had almost reached Him, now tossed away from Him again, until at length, wedged tightly as she was, she just managed, as once more she was carried past, to touch Him with her finger-tips. And instantly Christ turned and asked, "Who touched Me?" "Touched you!" said Peter. "Touched you! Bless me, who in this mêlée is not touching

you ? Lucky for any of us if we ever get out of this ! " But, " No, no," Christ said, " this was not a touch like that ; it barely reached Me, and yet I felt appeal in it, prayer in it, faith in it." Struggle you, too, to Him ; touch Him like that, and to you also there will come that healing you must have, that new power for which you have yearned in vain so long ; and you, too, will become another creature, with another higher, fuller, happier, healthier life. But you must fight your way to Him, must really believe that He can really help you.

That is the kind of faith Christ asks from us ; not a philosophical notion, not a sufficiently thorough metaphysical conception of Himself, but this practical thing, this cry of appeal that flings itself toward Him, sure that somehow He can manage for us, and He will. Doesn't even Luther tell us that it was his temptations that were his masters in divinity ; and that theology learned otherwise is merely speculation ? That other and more learned kind of faith, in some degree at least, will come. For if religion is an affection, and not a theory ; none the less that very affection forces us to construct our theory of the One we love.

Yet, is there not something that sets one thinking in the fact that that man whom Christ healed in the porches at Bethesda had no idea who it was to whom he owed it that this glory of health, and vigour, and life to be called life, had suddenly rushed in on him out of nowhere ? The whole country was agog about Jesus. They were discussing Him excitedly on every road. But in that quiet backwater in the porches yonder, where they drowsed away their days in the coolness of the shadows, or watched the sunshine shimmering upon the waters of the pool, they were too self-absorbed, as invalids are often apt to be, to take much interest in national affairs. Or if they must have heard, as they were carried through the streets, of the wonderful new Prophet, at least they had never seen Him, had no notion, it seems, what He was like, and did not recognize Him when He came among

them. "Who was it that healed me? Really, I don't know! I haven't an idea!" And the man, like that other who had been born blind, became quite irritated over it. "Why are you pestering me like this?" he cried. "I tell you I don't know Him. He was an utter stranger to me! I didn't notice Him threading His way among the others. But I happened to glance up, and He was standing there, looking at me. 'Take up that mat of yours, and walk,' He said—a stupid kind of thing to say; for if I could have done it, would I have lain there for whole eight-and-thirty years? And yet, somehow, looking at Him, I felt I could; and I tried; and I did! How? Just by looking at this man! What man? Haven't I told you I don't know! I was excited; it was all so wonderful. I was trying these limbs of mine that had lain cramped and useless for more than half a lifetime, and was finding I could really walk. And when I remembered, and turned round to thank Him, He was gone." Here was a man healed by a Christ he didn't know. And surely there is a real hope for some of us in that! This was a miracle, or at the least a very wonderful cure; and on such occasions Christ declared that faith was an essential to success. Yet this faith could not well have been more crude or rudimentary; and yet even it worked.

You also, perhaps, do not know Christ well; your mind does not work theologically: even the splendours of Paul rather dazzle your eyes than really enlighten them; there are difficulties that puzzle and stumble you, about miracles perhaps, or the resurrection, or the Cross. And yet you can be healed, it seems, by a Christ that you don't know. "Believest thou on the Son of God?" Christ asked the blind man He had cured. "Who is He, Lord, in order that I may believe in Him?" the other answered naively, healed, he too, by a Christ he did not know. Let us remember that. For as Denney, theologian though he was, laid it down long ago, we are losing masses of people who should be inside the Church, and have a full right to be there, because

of our insistence upon their acceptance of the whole ecclesiastical theology ; and, for his part, he was of the opinion that any one who could say, "I believe in God, through Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord and Saviour," is to be ranked among Christ's followers. Real saving faith can be a very simple thing. If, when you look at Christ, you feel here is life lived as I, too, would fain live it ; ay, and a Master who, I think, can lift me up toward that ; and, so thinking, throw yourself toward Him, begging Him to do it, in you also it will work. Struggle in His direction ; put out your hand and touch Him, though you are not close to Him ; give Him this practical, simplest faith He asks from us, this feeling that He can help you ; and even though you do not know Him, as you will do by and by, you also He will heal.

But with many of us our difficulty is just the opposite of that. Shameful although it be, the fact remains it is because we have known Christ so long that faith for us is not an easy thing.

There is a dramatic instance of that in the Gospels. In those first weeks of almost tumultuous success, when Christ seemed to have swept the country, and the whole land was a blaze of fervour and enthusiasm, with huge crowds pressing in on Him from everywhere, so that in the streets the crush about Him was almost suffocating, and even indoors there was no privacy, no leisure, no time in the full days even for a hurried meal, when everything seemed won, there was only one jarring note ; and it was His own family who struck it, that day when they came pushing through the throngs, begging for a passage on the ground that clearly Jesus had gone off His head, and they, His relatives, had come to take Him home and hide Him out of sight. Every one else was swept by wonder and amazement, but they who had lived with and known Him all their days, on that very account, had their eyes holden to all that, and did not see what every one else saw.

So it is still. As Mr. Chesterton says, the problem for

the Church to-day is that "we have to react against the heavy basis of fatigue. It is almost impossible to make the facts vivid, because the facts are so familiar: and for fallen men it is often true that familiarity is fatigue."

We have heard Christ's glorious words so often that even they have become trite to us, no longer bite with any sharpness into our inattentive, half-bored minds. Monckton Milnes once heard Carlyle declaring that "if Christ were to come to London now, He would not be crucified. Oh no! He would be lionized, asked out to dinner to hear the strange things He had got to say, and the bettermost people would wonder that a man so sensible on some points should be so foolish on others, would wish He were a little more practical, and so on." And that sounds likely enough had Christ come for the first time in our day. But, as things are, we have heard it all before, we think; and push aside the Testament as stale; and fill our minds with the inane and transitory chatter of some fifth-rate contemporary, finding some freshness and more interest in that. We have seen this wonderful Figure all our days, and His wonder has grown dulled to us, so that we take it as a thing of course, and think no more about it. We have worn a path across Calvary, and hardly notice the cross now, as we go hurrying past upon our own affairs; have largely lost the thrill, the wonder, the overmastering compulsion it once laid on our souls. The whole thing has grown faded, weathered, dim. If, cried à Kempis, speaking of the communion—if this were only to be had in one place, once a year, how folk would stream to it! But, because any one can have it anywhere, we turn in to it as to a commonplace affair of no particular account!

Do not let us exaggerate, for no good ever comes of that. It is in Christ's direction that the world in the end looks longingly, feeling, if much is ever to be done, He it is who must do it, and that with Him here the best is still possible after all. Always in every age the story is the same. Plans wither, dreams will not come true, people grow tired and

desperate. The whole world is out of joint; and our clumsy, fumbling fingers have no skill to set it; so we find, till we feel vexed, humiliated, beaten. But, always, when men catch sight of Christ, their hearts start, and stand still, look back at Him a second time, keep looking, with the dulness vanished from their faces, and a new tremendous hope sprung into being in their minds. If, they feel, this old, obstinate, thrawn world is ever to be righted, if we ourselves are ever to grow what we know we ought to be, yet can't live out, it is this Christ who must do it, that is clear. And He looks as if He can.

Phillips Brooks has some bonnie verses—they form one of the few hymns that are really poetry—in which he pictures himself standing in the dark street of Bethlehem that night so long ago, staring at that flickering light in the cowshed yonder burning on and on, though every other is long out; watching that worried knot of anxious people slipping to and fro, hearing at last the thin wailing of an infant's sudden voice, feeling, he says, that all the generations are gathered with him there in those narrow lanes, are watching with held breath. "O little town of Bethlehem, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee to-night." If it goes out, that poor, uncertain rushlight—all is over. But if it burn, why, everything is possible, even yet. If it be true, this wonderful tale of Jesus Christ, if this alleged power of His is a real fact which we can take and use, then there is hope indeed. But without Him, there is none.

And we, too, do feel that. In every difficulty it is towards Christ we look instinctively: in every temptation it is for His hand we feel to steady us. "Having lost hope," says Carlyle, "he had lost his all, and was poor indeed." "Yes," says Paul, "and it is Christ who is our hope." Lose Him, and you lose everything. It is Christ's presence in the world that rallies our discomfited souls, and somehow makes us trustful of a large and striking victory, where we have always failed!

Still it is difficult—is it not so ?—for us who know it all so well to raise faith to the temperature at which it works and grows really effective ; to keep on believing with any vividness of expectation ; to avoid slipping into nothing more purposeful than a vague feeling that in some undefined way something, perhaps, may come of it in the end, sometime, by and by. That is not nearly enough to bring things to the point, and to create the atmosphere in which Christ's power can work.

If only we could come to church, as these people made in Christ's direction, as eager and hopeful as they were, because knowing, we too, that we are going to meet Christ, and He will heal our definite needs, and meet our particular troubles, that He is sure to do it ; if, when we read Christ's promises, we could feel Him looking straight at us, and hear Him saying, This is meant for very you ; if, when we kneel in prayer, we could realize that we are in God's presence, are looking up into His face, and that He is listening to us, waiting to be gracious, the great and wonderful God ; if we could take it in again, and see it, and believe it, and act upon the assumption that it is really true, what would not follow ?

Is it not there that things break down, that while Christ does His part for us with a whole-hearted fulness, the easy little bit of our salvation that must be left to us is bungled ? And so the whole elaborate intricacy of machinery is stopped, and even Calvary does little in our case.

There is a verse into which there are crowded in one splendid constellation the three most characteristic words of the New Testament : " By grace are you saved through faith." That is to say, there is a Giver, an amazing Giver, prodigal in His lavish generosity, who gives His best to any one for nothing. There is a gift, how glorious a gift (for what can anybody need that there is not in Jesus Christ, our marvellous Saviour ?). But there must be also hands outstretched—is not that what faith means ?—lean, empty,

eager hands willing to take, and wistful to receive. It is that last that fails.

Well, if things are ever to right themselves, this bold and valorous appropriating faith must begin in some heart. And why should it not be in yours and mine ? Think, think until it all grows vivid to your heart again ; stand still on Calvary and look until you see it ; struggle towards Jesus Christ, through everything that dims and dulls the gospel to you, until you have that ardent, watchful eagerness of faith that comes into His presence with a happy sense that great things are upon the threshold, and that sees doors opening to let in who knows what ? For who can reckon up what Christ can do ? It is so small a part in our salvation He has left to us ! But if we did it, what would we not see ? Why not begin to give Him, here and now, that happy expectancy that normally He needs in us, so that for us too, for each one of us, it may all come wholly true.

XIX

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST'S SILENCE

"And when He was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto Him, Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee? And He answered him never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly."—MATT. xxvii. 12–14.

ACCORDING to one version of his letter to the Philadelphians, Ignatius has a striking saying about Christ: "He effects more by His silence than others do with all their talking." And again to the Ephesians: "He who possesses the word of Jesus is truly able to hear even His very silence." These surely are bold sayings. Let us think round them for a little while—some things Christ teaches by His silence.

Every one knows, from actual experience, that silence can and does speak far more movingly than even the subtlest of words, that it is the real native language of the heart, on which instinctively it falls back in its deepest moments and most solemn moods. Francis Thompson, speaking of Mrs. Meynell, tells us that "the footfalls of her muse awaken not sounds but silences." And that is true of all great literature; might, indeed, not unfairly be set down as its sign-manual and distinctive mark. You thrill a crowd, and it shouts and hurrahs; but stir it yet deeper, and it listens in a queer, tense, breathless stillness. Things have gone much too far for noise and cheers. "They hung upon Him, listening," we read of the people, with their eyes, their hearts, their very being, riveted on Jesus Christ. At a graveside

one does not speak much, if at all. The pressure of a hand, we feel, says more, and does it better. An ugly rumour blows about. And the man's enemies are up at once, and barking noisily. That may mean little, is no proof. But let some one who loves the man, and knows the facts, enter the room and say nothing in angry and indignant answer to that buzz of bitter talk, and his ominous silence speaks more clearly than does all their eager clamour. With a sick heart, we know the thing is true. Often, when our souls are raw and tired and fretted, the almost eerie hush and stillness of the moors soothes and heals and brings us near to God again: and once more we experience it was no freakish fancy that made Wordsworth hold that the most formative things in a man's life can be, not any of the voices round us, and not all the wealth of human lore, but "the silence that is in the starry skies, the sleep that is among the lonely hills." Silence can speak, can teach, can move one inexpressibly.

And the evangelists are at pains to make it plain that there was something awesome and arresting about Jesus' silence. Once and again they refer to it; and always they leave the impression that at such times they have learned to watch Him even more breathlessly than is their wont. And, as they show, with reason.

Peter heard many wonderful words of Christ. And yet, be sure, that to the end none of them all haunted him as did that terrible moment when, in the dreadful silence, he watched Christ girding Himself with the towel, with his mind beginning to suspect what was to be, saw Him kneel down before one of the circle, and come nearer and nearer to himself till the unhappy man felt the touch of Christ's hands on his feet, and his whole soul rose up in passionate repentant protest. Ah how, to the very end, the thought of it brought the quick blood rushing to his face! Or as that other hour, yonder beside the leaping flames, though, no doubt, he had taken care to stand well back, deep in the shadows, when the sudden

persistence of an inquisitive lassie's awkward questioning broke through his guard; and, startled and confused, he found himself ringing out his hot denials, in a voice much louder than he realized, so that it carried over all the din to Christ; and He, cut to the quick by that, far deeper than by all the horrors of the Roman scourging, turned and looked in his direction, sought for him, found him, held him, with eyes in which there lay what pain, what disappointment, what entreaty not to throw away his soul! It was not what Christ said, it was His silence, that broke Peter's heart.

And, indeed, we have the Master's own authority that we are not out on a fanciful and futile quest. "If it were not so," He said, "I would have told you." Surely you can be certain that, if I had seen you blundering and going wrong, I would have corrected you, withstood you, turned you. You can quite safely make deductions from My silence.

Not that we are to fling wide an open door, and allow any silly fancies of our own to enter, and then father them on Jesus Christ, on the ground that He has not expressly and in set terms disavowed them. All the ages down we have been guilty of that far too much, have changed the faith more than we know; and the Master is not to be held responsible for what our blundering hands have made of it.

All His teaching days He was hampered and straitened by the crassness of His friends, by the way they kept misconceiving and misrepresenting Him, had to repeat over and over the first elementary lessons, about forgiveness and humility and the like. And He did it with amazing patience. "If," said Confucius irritably, "when I have shown a man one angle of a subject, he can't see the other three for himself, I can't be bothered with such a fool." It was not so with Jesus Christ. Yet He did feel that, largely, He was being baffled, that not a little He had meant to say had to be left

unsaid. "I have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now," He said; and there was sadness in His voice. Not, surely, that what we have is the mere alphabet and rudiments of all that He had in His mind to teach us. For what better could He give us than the wonderful story of God's love, and God's forgiveness, and God's bewildering grace? But He had hoped to carry things further, to apply His message more and more, to fill in many details that would have been of immense service to us. As things are, He says, the best that can be done now is to listen closely to My teaching, to treat it honestly, not overlooking nor neglecting such of it as may not happen to appeal much to your mind, to live face to face with it, and absorb from it something of My spirit—do that, and then, about the things that I have had to leave vague and undefined, trust your own hearts.

And, indeed, with regard to many matters that lie very near our soul, we are left precisely there.

Shall we, for instance, know our dear ones in the other world? Our hearts cry Yes, feeling that our affections are not passing shadows blown along the hills and gone, that in love there is something divine that must last as long as God Himself. Yet there is not much in the Gospels on the matter. True, I have listened to a notable preacher maintaining that the whole point of the raising of the son of that widow in Nain lies in the words, "And He gave him back to his mother": that the miracle was performed simply and solely to give our Lord a chance, so we were told, of teaching us in this dramatic way that in the other world we and our dead shall be together again. But, obviously, that is to wrest scripture in a way that is simply dishonest, and that sinks far below the common and accepted canons of the working world. Really we have to fall back, in the main, upon Christ's silence. He tells us that we are to be with Him; and we assume that that covers the other. And though there are, as we can see, problems and difficulties

not a few, we make that glorious, brave deduction confidently. For if it were not so, surely He would have told us !

As Lockhart cried :

> " But 'tis an old belief,
> That on some solemn shore,
> Beyond the sphere of grief,
> Dear friends shall meet once more.
>
> That creed I fain would keep,
> That faith I'll not forgo :
> Eternal be the sleep,
> Unless to waken so."

Or what about the very little ones, too young for faith, or who have missed this or that held in some quarters to be essential ? There have been sections of the Church that, from one reason or another, pushing logic to the uttermost, have come at times to grim and bleak conclusions, from which the whole soul revolts. Whatever is to happen to ourselves, we feel that in the Father's house there is the pattering of little feet, the happy laugh of little voices, know that if there be a God at all, surely the bairns are gathered in His arms, are carried, safe and with that childish sigh of huge contentment, close against His heart. Some of the Mahayana Buddhists have a god called Jizo, the conqueror of hell, and the friend of little children, in itself a moving and most exquisite combination. And in Japan they have a bonnie poem which depicts the wee ones in the other world, newly arrived, still feeling strange and shy, and not a little frightened and homesick for their mothers' arms, with lips a-tremble, on the verge of tears ; and how he comes to them, " Then he caresses them kindly, folding his shining robes round them, lifting the smallest and frailest into his bosom, and holding his staff for the stumblers to clutch. To his long sleeves cling the infants, smile in response to his smiling, Jizo the diamond of Pity, Jizo the little one's God." And our hearts feel that there must be a real truth there.

Yet in the Gospels there is not much, if anything, about it.

"Suffer the little children to come unto Me," we cut on the small gravestones. And aching hearts, and clinging hands, let go a little less reluctantly hearing that voice. And yet the context of the passage is not very apposite. Really, we fall back confidently on Christ's silence, argue from that with boldness, know they have not gone out into a lonesome place but home, that if our hands are very useless, queerly idle in the still house, that if our love can do but little for them now, God's love is round about them yonder, a God who even in this world feels that it is the little ones who know and understand Him best; who, passing from our shallow, worldly wisdom and dull earthinesses, turns with relief to them with whom He is far more at home, to the big, trustful eyes, and the implicit confidence, and the small hand slipping confidingly into His. "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," Jesus said, breathing there its very atmosphere, "and those who would be near Me must become like these." "Look for me in the nurseries of heaven," Francis Thompson said. Is it not in the nurseries of earth that we come nearest God? When a little one kneels down and prays, or when you stand beside them as they sleep, has your awed soul, scarcely breathing, never felt God was so real, so close, so surely there, that you have started, and looked round, expecting you would see Him? Trust your own heart, says Christ, for if it were not so, I would have told you.

But look at a few of the silences of Christ recorded for us in the Scriptures, and see what we can learn from them. One might dwell long enough on that almost unbroken silence of the years and years at Nazareth, years that seem so inexplicably wasted. Here was a needy world of desperate men and women, troubled, frivolous, ailing, sin-sick; and there was Jesus Christ, in whom lay all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and that was what was done with Him! Why was He hidden away so purposelessly? Why was His glorious soul allowed to squander all its unique nature on such trivialities, which surely any one could have put

through well enough to release Him for something vastly bigger and more nearly fitted to His gifts and powers? The carrying out, however thoroughly, of the dull orders of a petty country business up a back street, what use was that to make of the most perfect being by far that even God's hands ever fashioned? Yet to that He was set, and at that He was kept. Why this unutterably stupid waste? But was it waste? Was it not there He taught us, there alone that He could teach us, one of the greatest and most vital of His lessons, without which, indeed, all the rest had seemed to most of us only a tale of long ago and far away, a beautiful ethereal thing blown to us out of another more romantic world than ours, with no connection with the petty actualities of our drab little lives? For here are we, set down in the din and rush and dust of life, jostled and crushed and crowded. There it is, if at all, that we must live our faith, and work out our religion. And often it seems hopeless. In other, cooler atmospheres it might be possible, but not for folk so breathless and perspiring, whose hot hands, grimy with the machinery of life, soil everything they touch—ay, and how can we help it? Perhaps it might be done in other, quieter places, where we could hear God's voice, and have time to pay attention, but not amid this babble, not so rushed and bustled and flurried as we are, with our minds always filled with a whole troop of noisy trivialities and pushing urgencies!

But the thing has been done just there. It was while living a life like ours that Jesus made His marvellous discoveries; it was among our very circumstances that He tested them and proved them. If He is so certain that we can trust God absolutely, can always count on Him, can build our life with confidence upon that basis, it is because He, with a widowed mother, and many mouths to feed, had found it so in many a grim emergency and many a narrow place that seemed the end. If He tells us with such assurance that prayer is a marvellous thing, that does far more than any one who has not tried it can believe, He knows,

because His own prayers there at Nazareth have had such certain, such astonishing, results. If He believes in man, the poorest and the shabbiest of us all, in whom the rest of us can see nothing lovable or dependable whatever, it is because in that horrid little place, with its notoriously unsavoury reputation, He had found brave souls and kindly spirits hidden away behind the unprepossessing faces and rough exteriors. If He teaches His faith to us with such bold confidence that it will bring us honourably through anything and everything that we may have to face, it is because in His own life, a life like ours, this thing had worked.

As Matthew Arnold says, in one of his sonnets, you cannot escape Christ, do what you will. You reject His divinity, but, so doing, you have not evaded Him. If He is just a man like us, then obviously you must be a man like Him! Face to face with this new standard, you dare not ignore it. Once you have seen it, you cannot go back from this to contentedness with the old lower way of things, or your heart will cry out with a horror like that which Wesley records ran through the settlement in Georgia when a white woman, preferring their ways, went off with the Indians, and refused to be brought back. So, once you feel the wonder of those hidden years, once it comes home to you that this teaching of Christ is not only for saints and heroes and folk out of the rush of common life, but that it has been lived out perfectly just where it is now asked of us, at home, and in business, and in the spending of our leisure, and in the way we do our daily tasks, the old excuses all collapse in ruins ; and, taught by Christ's silence, we know that this is laid on us, however commonplace we be, and that we, too, must live our life after this fashion.

Or, take that strange incident of the Syrophœnician woman, when she, poor soul, so desperate about her lassie, and knowing what our Lord had done for others in their need, so many others, burst in upon Him, and He paid no heed ; kept crying and crying, and somehow He did not answer, till the

disciples, for once, so it appeared, more sympathetic than the Master, could stand the pain of it no longer and besought Him, if He could do nothing for her, to send her away. It is unbearable, they said, it is breaking our hearts—a strange incident, which makes us stare at Him in astonishment, for He seems so unlike Himself. And indeed He was, though at the last, His whole face lit with pleasure, He heaped upon her all that she could ask.

Of that much might be said ; but let us concentrate on this one point. Does not this strange silence of Christ go to prove that you and I may be losing things very vital to us through the lack of a certain patience and persistence and even vehement obstinacy in our prayers, from which we shrink as scarcely seemly ; and yet, sometimes at least, it would appear that is the only method that enables God to work out upon our behalf all that is in His heart for us. It is not, of course, that He is slow to give, or miserly, or grudging. The very words are an almost unforgivable outrage. For the whole point of the gospel is that always He is spending Himself eagerly for those who have no claim on Him, and gives His most and best out of pure grace and the sheer joy of giving, till Paul confesses frankly that he, for one, can't understand it, is entirely sure that no man could ever be so amazingly generous, or so stubborn in settled loving-kindness towards the utterly unworthy.

When Avicenna sent his soul on its bold journey through the other worlds, he was told that he would know that he was nearing God when he found himself among beings who serve day and night without ever a wish to rest ; and that, though God is really so unlike our human conceptions of Him that he might blunder into His presence and not recognize Him, he could infallibly know Him by this : Don't look for thrones and splendours, but when you come on One without a thought of self, spending His whole life for others, in lowly and humble and unwearied kindness, down on your face in worship, because that is God !

That is made plain in every page of the New Testament. Once on a day, indeed, I heard a good man in his pulpit, carried away further than he realized by a hard, formal logic founded upon one particular text, announce, as his first head, that God never gives unless we ask from Him, a lie so obvious, a blasphemy so monstrous, that it left one cold and stunned. Did we ask God for this marvellous being with which, out of His mere good pleasure, He has seen fit to endow us? Did we ask Him for Jesus Christ? That is His gift to us. He thought out Christ, He planned and gave us that amazing answer to our gross sin and ingratitude; what human brain could have conceived so glorious a Saviour?

And yet, while He keeps underlining the bewildering generosity of God, Christ is so sure that only a certain dogged obstinacy on our part can, sometimes at least, cut the channels down which His grace can run to us and reach us, that He does not shrink from using the most audacious metaphors that may, by foolish minds, be very easily misunderstood; talks of a boorish neighbour, and of an unjust Judge, who must be plagued and followed about and worried till, sick of that tearful voice, and in a kind of passion, he flings the woman's rights at her, anything to be done with her, and this intolerable persecution; speaks about battering upon God's door; "shamelessly," He advises.

There is for me one of the most real and practical problems of the spiritual life. On the one side, the whole point of Christ's teaching, the very living centre of it, is that we can trust God absolutely, that there is never any need to fuss and fret and fidget, that our worries are just irreligious, clear proofs that we don't know God as we ought to do. Looking round this careworn world of folk so anxious and uneasy and distraught, Jesus has something like amazement showing plainly in His eyes. Your Father knows, He says, that you have need of all these things, and He will surely see to it; and, unafraid, you can leave it to Him. That peace of mind, that quietness of spirit, that absolute

and tranquil confidence in God that talks things out with Him humbly and simply, and thereafter goes its way, content that He should do with us as He sees best, more eager for that than that our own foolish wishes, which we have learned largely to distrust, should come true, that, surely, is the very pith and heart and soul of Christianity.

And yet, upon the other side, there is this stress laid by the Master, here by His silence, and elsewhere by His words, upon this set vehemence that keeps again and again bursting in on God, that follows Him, that dogs Him, that refuses to be shaken off, that will not take a rejection or denial; this violence that storms, not only the kingdom, as Christ said, but sometimes it would seem God's very mercy-seat itself. There they are, both enjoined upon us; and how to combine the two, to carry both of them at once in due proportion in one's mind is for me one of the most real and perplexing of problems which I, for one, confess that I have not yet solved.

Only let us try to be sure of these two things: first, that our hot insistence in God's presence really is faith; and not rather a colossal impudence that would hector the Almighty, and counsel the All-wise, poutingly pushing aside His will: and, on the other hand, that our acquiescence is a humble childlikeness of spirit, and not simply a laziness that doesn't care much either way, and that can't be bothered asking much for what it might have, and is meant to have.

Or, again, how arresting are the silences of Christ, face to face with His several judges, before the High Priest, before Herod, before Pilate. The Evangelists themselves must have been immeasurably impressed by them, they keep so underlining them, and emphasizing them, and keeping the fact of them full in the centre of their canvas. All of them are awesome, but it is the third that grips tightest upon the heart. For Herod, even Christ seems to have had little or no hope. He sent a message to him once that is nearly contempt: and face to face with this flippant thing that

hailed His coming as a new excitement for his jaded palate, as a providentially sent means of putting in quite interestingly a long, empty afternoon through which he had thought to have nothing better to do than yawn drearily—"I've got something rather good for you to-day," he told his women; "that prophet (no, not John, the other one) has run Himself into trouble; and Pilate, very decently, is sending Him along to me. We'll make Him show us some of His tricks. Oh yes, He is quite good, they say; He does queer things, and He'll be eager enough to be at His best to save His life" —face to face with a despicable mind like that, Christ had no word to say.

And as for the High Priest, He seems to have felt that the man was really committed, that the trial was, in great degree at least, only an idle show; and there, too, He fell silent.

But towards Pilate the New Testament is strangely gentle. There is no word of anger or reproach; and it learned that from Christ, who looked at him sorrowfully as at a trapped creature, and would fain have helped him if He could. As they stand face to face, these two, one has the curious feeling that their rôles have been reversed; that quite obviously it is Christ who is the judge, and that the other knows it. The man is flustered and unhappy; his Roman justice sees through the thin plot, feels somehow instinctively that this is a trumped-up charge, knows in his bones the witnesses are lying; he paces to and fro; he goes in; he comes out; he takes Christ aside, and back into the court; he tries various expedients, now this, now that. And at the first, for long indeed, Christ answers with a kind of pity for him in His eyes. But by and by here, too, He will say nothing, stands deliberately silent. Till Pilate, we read, was amazed at it; and so, indeed, are we; feel inclined even yet to cry to Him across the years, "Speak! speak! for everything depends on it. Don't throw away your life unnecessarily. Think of the lost world and its need of Thee!

Everything is hanging in the balances. Don't let this puzzled soul blunder to ruin for lack of guidance. Tell him they are twisting your words. Explain. He will believe you! The man's heart is obviously on your side, and is seeking for some way to extricate you from the toils. Speak! speak!" But Christ would not—stood absolutely silent. Why?

To begin with, life is a very lonely thing. None of us, in the last resort, can take another's place; and the greater that our need of that is, the more impossible does it become. It is the child's pain; and the mother stands outside it, cannot with all her longing bear the torture for the little one. When a decision must be made, we older people may advise, urge, implore, but it is the lad himself who has to choose and will. No one can do it for him. And it appears there is a limit beyond which even Christ can't go. Whenever our faces are turned toward some foolishness, He pleads with us, follows us, bars the road to us. But if we push past Him and persist, it is our life, and He can't live it for us. As an experienced Christian wrote me once in a perplexing hour, these seasons of decision are God's examination papers. He has been teaching us patiently, tenderly, thoroughly, and now He sets this test to discover if we are grasping the thing, if we have caught the spirit of it, whether we shall choose wisely or selfishly, will think of our own interests or of the bigger things; and He, the Teacher, cannot do the paper for us, must stand back a little way. It would be so much easier to carry it, but the child must be set down on its own uncertain feet; and, further on, even the steadying hand must be withdrawn, and it be left to stand shakily by itself, poor little soul, although the encircling arms are very watchful, very strong, and very near. Still it must walk alone. And even Christ can't will for us; it is we who must decide.

Moreover, Jesus saw that Pilate knew his duty, and that he was shirking it, that he had finally made up his mind that he would not, and could not, do the one thing that there was

to do with honour, and was trying to shuffle through upon some lower ground. And in that Christ would raise no finger to assist him. He had answered willingly so long as the man's mind was open and really hesitating. But now, He felt, he had closed it, had deliberately chosen wrongly; and Christ, in view of that, had nothing more to say. His silence, with His eyes upon the other, was a last appeal, a sorrowful reproach, a dreadful condemnation.

And you and I better remember that. For how is it with us? Has it with us, too, come to this of it that we can drift along now with the world about us, do what it does, be what it is, without the old uneasy feeling of disloyalty to Christ? Have we so tamed our conscience that it follows at our heel meekly enough? Have we grown so accustomed to our failings that we hardly notice them, and are no longer hurt by the presence of these old familiars sprawling and loafing about our hearts, as if they were there by right? And Christ says nothing. His voice does not break in on you as it used to do. And you don't see the horror of it all!

There was a prophet once who looked around him at a people, frivolous, giddy, sinful, and entirely easy in their minds; and he said that he heard God calling to him, from how far away, "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone." No sound, no pleading, no reproach, no ruffled conscience! What if you, too, He is letting alone! "O Lord God, punish us, but be not silent toward us," Luther prayed. And, indeed, pain is a kindly, hopeful thing, a certain proof of life, a clear assurance all is not yet over, that there is still a chance. But if your heart has no pain, well, that may betoken health, as you suppose. But are you certain that it does not mean your soul is dead?

If Christ has fallen silent toward you—quick, quick, learn the lesson of that while there is still time. What was it He desired of you that you refused? You must get back to that, if you would know the old, happy, intimate relationship again. For till you do, He has no more to say. And all

your friendliness toward Him leaves Him unimpressed. He will not waive the point. He will not pass it over. Until you meet that, and do what you know He requires of you, He stands obstinately silent.

And, lastly, there is that tremendous silence on the Cross. "Seven times He spoke, seven words of love, and all three hours His silence cried for mercy on the souls of men." And that has moved and won the world far more than anything beside, than all His teaching, all His healings, all that He was, and all that He did. Explain it how you will, it is at Calvary that the hideousness of sin, the homely, ordinary sins of which we ourselves are so often guilty, breaks in on our stunned minds: there also that the certainty of God's love and forgiveness come home to our souls, till we are sure of them, surer by far than even all Christ's wonderful pictures of them left us. If you are losing the old vivid sense of it, if it is growing dim and faded in your mind, if you are somehow not so certain that it can be true for you as you once were, better even than listening to the Master's deepest teaching, than even the Prodigal, the sixth of John, the Upper Room, is it to climb this little hill again.

Come, for it is not far; and all is quiet now; the enemies are gone, and the last lingering friend has turned away. This is the place. How still and silent it all is! Stand here, and look up, till the thing grows real to you, till your heart sees it, feels it, takes it in. This is what wins the world, this is what lays compulsion on it, draws it, masters it. Deeper than all He did, than all He said, than all He was, is the appeal of the dead Christ, who died for you. And here Christ claims us as no call even of His elsewhere can do. If this leaves you cold, if you can stand here in this awful silence still unwon, then God has nothing further left to try. The hush about the Cross is His last word.

Is not Ignatius justified? And does not this wonderful Christ effect more by His very silences than others do with all their noisy talking?

XX

A PEEP AT THE LAST PAGE

"No one who believes in Him, the Scripture says, will ever be disappointed. No one."—Rom. x. 11–12 (Moffatt).

THERE is a bold promise for you, face to face with this great ailing world of needy hearts and hungry spirits. And yet Paul flings it down with absolute assurance. No one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed, will ever have to stand disconsolately watching the big dreams fade and the brave hopes going out, will ever find to his discomfiture that there is not so much in this as he had been led to suppose, or that this so-called Saviour has proved less than adequate for him, will ever end mocked by large promises that in his case have come to little, baffled, beaten, lost. No one. The poorest bungler, thinking of making trial of Christ, can start sure of that.

Elsewhere there may be disillusionment—there often is. Plans, although bravely carried through, may fail; and life, even though lived out gallantly enough, may prove a greatly tamer thing than one had hoped. But there is one sphere where there is no failure and no disenchantment, and no having to be satisfied with a cheap second best. Let a man, any man, give himself to Christ, and really let that Christ have His way with him, and, to a certainty, his most daring hopes will justify themselves, and his most splendid dreams grow facts. I guarantee it, so Paul says, allege with confidence that there are no exceptions. That, in any case, it should break down in less than was expected is unthinkable, has never happened—no, and never will.

Perhaps that does not strike us as much as it should, because any real hopes we have in Christ are apt to be trivial and petty, amounting to little more—is it not often so ?—than a blurred feeling, left largely undetailed, that, of course, we are the better for Him, though just how and in what ways we don't pause to specify ; that, and a vague idea that in any case sometime and somehow, at death perhaps, or some other occasion still well ahead, something more definite will, no doubt, ultimately happen. Meantime, we potter on from day to day with nothing very notable to show for it as yet, with the old faults stubbornly surviving, and the familiar failings showing through, staring and obvious as ever. And that apparently contents us, does not strike us as something vastly less effective than what we were plainly promised. A faith so unambitious is not difficult to satisfy.

But in the New Testament it is quite otherwise. It pitches things so high, it wakens such enormous expectations, it throws about in Jesus' name such staggering promises that look enormously unlikely. Nothing in human thought even approaches the daring of the claims that these men make for Jesus Christ, and for what He can do for any one. Listen to the audacious prayers they boldly offer on behalf of humdrum and quite commonplace folk, plainly expecting a full answer to them ! Paul writes to some very ordinary mortals whose Christian life, as he was well aware, had had its rise in a peculiarly muddy and polluted source. Out of such soiled impossible material, you and I would have said with confidence that there could be knocked up only a make-shift affair at best. But no, says Paul, not if Christ is the workman. With Him to draw upon at every step, no dream is too bold, no hope too greedy, no height too steep and high even for these frail, shabby-looking creatures to attain. For my part, so he tells them, I keep praying every day for every one of you, that, as you move about your lives, and put through your slave duties, you may so carry yourselves from hour to hour that even on His cross Christ's eyes may light up at

the sight of you, and you may hear Him saying exultantly, "It is worth while; and eagerly and gladly I would face and bear it all again to be the inspiration of such lives, the power that can produce natures so clean and generous and gracious. Yes, even Calvary itself is not too big a price for this." "I pray that you may all be worthy of the Lord, yes, and entirely satisfying to Him." And I know that my answer will come, and that it will prove really so, and that in you. "Then said Jesus, our kind Lord," to Juliana, "It is a joy, a bliss, an endless satisfying to Me, that ever I suffered passion for thee."

It is against the background of tremendous hopes like these that Paul calmly writes this confident assurance that there has never been, ay, and will never be, a case where Jesus has failed, where some one with any understanding of the point of the whole thing, trusted Him and received less than he expected. These people had claimed everything from Christ, and always they had got it. Taking him literally, and at His bare word, they had ventured on Him to the uttermost, and every time it had come true. Christ can do anything for any one, so they had found. That was for them a basal fact of life, settled and fixed and proved; and it is founding upon long experience that they declare that whatever you may be, however hopeless it may seem, look you to Christ and you, too, will find that it works, that His grace is sufficient where your need is, and His strength enough for you. There is no risk whatever in faith now, so they maintain. For we are long past the initial stage of trial and experiment. We know. I have myself, they say, tested Christ in the living of my life, as drastically as a man can do, in situations that seemed hopeless, and He never once has failed me. I have seen people of all sorts apply Him to all kinds of troubles. And every time their sores were healed, and their wants met and answered. Whatever your need be, take it boldly to Christ, and He will never disappoint you. It is not His way; and never in our whole

experience of Him, amounting now to years and years, have we seen Him baffled in a soul that really leant on Him, not even once! So much so that we now know that cannot happen.

Surely such an assurance as that, from those who have made it their business in life to study this very thing, thrusts upon us a new fact with which we must deal.

To begin with, there are those, young people it may be or busy folk, who, although drawn to Christ, have not yet closed with Him. They do feel the thrill of what He offers; they recognize the glory of His service. But they have an uneasy feeling that they are not the type of person for this kind of thing; or they can't credit that, in hard fact, it would really make much difference to them in their struggle against their too obstinate temptations. And so, though they look toward Him wistfully at times, they hang back hesitatingly, and are not Christ's. But does not this confident witness from all those with the right to speak come as the determining factor to push them over into definite action?

Romanes tells us that he became a Christian, lured thereto not so much by faith, strictly so called, as just by common intellectual honesty, and that judicial mindedness, that candid willingness to face all alleged facts, which is the first working rule of every reputable man of science. As he explains, given enough evidence to build up a primary case, it is the business of a scientist, not to think, not to argue, far less petulantly to dismiss what may not fit into his own theories and preconceived ideas, but patiently and thoroughly to make personal trial of the thing by actual experiment. And here he found himself confronted by masses of people who declared that they had proved in their own actual experience that the Christian facts really are facts. From his particular angle that might appear most unlikely, and indeed it did. Yet here, also, he felt he had no right to an opinion one way or the other until such time as he had made honest experiment for himself. And when he did, he too

found, not a little to his own surprise, yet beyond doubt, that the thing really works.

Surely that is the only honourable course for reasonable people. Bengel admits in the preface to his commentaries that any one beginning such a task ought to put to himself the searching question : " By what right am I doing this ? " And if people who push aside the gospel as too good to be true, as incredibly splendid, as what just can't be, would ask themselves by what right they are doing that, they would often find that they have none, that they are animated merely by a prejudice, or a presupposition, or a blind unscientific feeling which has no evidence behind it, but merely supposes this, or assumes that, flies indeed in the face of all the witnesses who alone have the right to speak, for they alone have tried.

If you, too, will only try where the pinch lies for you, you, too, will share the unbroken experience, will find that however grave your situation be, and however unlikely it may seem that anything can help, there Christ will really bring you through with honour. It may take time, it may need patience, it may make large demands upon your hardihood and courage. But if you keep steadfastly looking to Him, or even doggedly begin again after every too frequent forgetfulness, the end is absolutely sure.

We challenge you, says Paul, to produce any situation with which Christ cannot fully cope. What's that you say ? That you are desperately weak, with a poor, fickle, undependable will that keeps wavering suddenly just where your need is direst ? Still, even for poltroons like that His grace has proved itself sufficient. That you are blundering and foolish ? Ah ! But this is One who is far wiser than our hearts, and heaps on us what we have not even the wit to ask for, or to know we need ! That you have made a sorry mess of things and thrown away your battle, that battle which, says Dale, " is lost or won before it seems to begin : the temptation in the wilderness determines, or largely determines our fate, and every habit, good or evil, of those

early years seems to have permanently affected my whole life"? I know. Yet Christ's grace is not overawed and baffled by our weakness. Rather it is toward such beaten creatures, caught fast in the thickets of their own past foolishnesses, that it rises to its fulness. Let your need be what it may, there is ample in Christ for that.

Yes, and for a whole world of souls as desperate as yours. For your case is not nearly so wonderful as you suppose. Don't you remember how Emerson, when shyly and diffidently he ventured to let slip some of the most secret facts of his own heart and life, found to his bewilderment that these things were not unique, as he had always imagined; but that when he described the lonely places where his footsteps had rung out so eerily, multitudes knew every feature of the road, broke in with little details that he had forgotten; for they also had been there? And an apostle looks a little quizzically at some scared souls, sadly flustered and perturbed, and bids them try to take it in that the temptations that loom up before them so tremendous that they feel no one ever can have been as tried as this in all the history of man are nothing but the usual lot of the great mass of folk. It is quite common, so he tells them, just the ordinary discipline which most people have to meet—quite common. There is no need for you despondently to rule out your troubles and your problem as beyond even Christ. Upon the contrary, your very case has been met times uncountable in lives past numbering, that same want has been fully satisfied, that very trouble has been wholly healed, those identical temptations that so bully you have often and often been whipped by Christ out of hearts no less frail than yours. And hectoringly though they bear themselves toward you, they dare not face Him, knowing that there in your life, as so often elsewhere, He can overthrow them, and He will.

There is really no manner of risk about it nowadays. For, if you venture, you are not daringly faring forth into

untraversed seas. You are taking a homely path worn broad and plain and bare by countless feet. And these others all won home. Always when things grow dark and difficult, the folk of the New Testament stand still a moment and listen ; and always, as if by magic, the tire fades from their faces, and their hearts go singing on their way once more. And that because there, in the busy din and press of life, they have heard wafted back to them that shout of many voices, not a few of which their hearts remember and can recognize, giving praise because the grace in which they trusted has done all it promised, and has really brought them through. And with that these other souls that had been tempted to discouragement pick up their difficult lives again, and go their ways laughing at the foolish fears that had knocked at their doors ! Because once more they know that they are building on a thing that has been proved over and over, and that cannot fail. No, says Paul, never. No one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. No one.

But, further, this surely comes as a challenge and rebuke to many Christian people, leaving us hot-faced and ashamed. No one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. That obviously is the winning note ; and it is ominous that we seem to have largely lost it, are disappointed, or at least give the impression that we are, in a way that is grossly disloyal to the Master, and that gravely misrepresents the facts. These Christians of the early days swept the world because they had, and knew they had, something that robbed life of its terrors, and that made them fit and able to face anything. They were so strong, so sure, so happy, that other people turned and looked wistfully after them, eager to find a share in that something which these fortunate folk possessed that evidently made so vast a difference. And indeed it did. Because of it, these ordinary men and women had had their whole lives radically changed, and knew it. With it to draw upon they were ready boldly to measure

themselves against the oldest and the strongest evils, and audaciously with their bare hands they tugged them crashing down. Were they told bluntly that this or that proposal of theirs was, on the face of it, impossible, they laughed, and said that there was no such word in their vocabulary. And indeed they did not need it, were, so other people felt, uncanny in the quiet efficiency with which they carried through what every one had always known could not be done.

To-day the Church's spirit seems pathetically different. There is no use bringing a railing accusation against the age. For what Emerson said of his is no less true of ours. People, he remarked, keep talking against the times. Yet I, for my part, can see nothing wrong with them; they seem, like all times, very good times, if only we knew what to do with them! Yet this of ours has some disquieting features; and, not least among them this, that the Church seems to have lost heart somewhat, has allowed the old assurance and enthusiasm to cool below the temperature at which big things get done, is always whimpering and complaining about something, has developed a foolish trick of gathering into corners in discouraged groups and bleating disconsolately that God seems to do strangely little in our day, the very mood that so maddened the Hebrew prophets that they itched to lay violent hands upon their countrymen, and literally shake it out of them. We Church people have become so prone to loud and abusive self-depreciation that the thing amounts to a disease and does unreckonable damage; seeing that, upon the one hand, the steady drip drip of this cold, persistent rain of disheartening talk soaks pitilessly into people's shivering souls; and, on the other, that though these doleful spirits are not altogether serious, are throwing words about in a wild way, and uttering much less than their final and considered judgments, the world is listening, and takes us, not unnaturally, at our own dismal and unflattering valuation. There you are, it says; upon their own showing, they are doing next to nothing, are of little practical use.

With the result that people fling away from us, and take their zeal and energy elsewhere into more hopeful quarters.

And many of ourselves seem half inclined to agree with them. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," says Paul. Or, as Moffatt makes it run, "I am proud of it"; and indeed that does sound more like the authentic voice of the Apostle. I am proud of it. And well we may be proud of it, as the one intellectual reading of this puzzling life of ours that satisfies for long, as the one offered cure that dares to face the bitterest of the facts, as the one power that has shown conclusively that, given its chance, it can really carry through what this sick world requires. Yet many of us seem to be disappointed in Christ, the very thing which Paul claims is impossible in a real Christian. He is so slow, so undramatic, we complain, and we want something quick, and sudden, and wholesale; and so we edge away toward some poor surface scheme of mere material reform.

These first Christians won because they knew they had something to offer that could meet all needs. But when the world asks us about it now, well, we say, not a little puzzled and disconcerted, we have got here what will put things right, or at least it used to do it, and it ought to do so still. But for the moment it seems somehow out of gear, and not working as sweetly as it should. On which they turn impatiently away. When you have got that contraption of yours into working order, they cry across their shoulders, we may consider it. But life is short, and it is running on, and meantime we must, it seems, try something else. And so, in a time when there is a mighty going in the tops of the trees, when the clean winds of God are blowing healthfully up fetid courts and along dingy alleys, and His blessed sunshine is finding its way into dismal corners of life that have too long been kept dark and unaired and stuffy, when anything might happen, by our faint-heartedness and gloom we are cheating Christ of the world that He might win.

If only we believed our faith as these first disciples did;

if only, so believing, we were happy and high-hearted as they were; if only, like them, we were living proofs of its effectiveness that can't be hidden, how we might sweep men to Him in these days when everywhere there is a raw sense that things are wrong and must somehow be straightened out; and every one, each according to his taste, is seeking something that will make of life a fuller and a richer thing, and, so the wiser, at least, hope and pray, bring in around us that new, happier earth wherein dwells righteousness!

But the fact is that in their own lives also many of them seem to be a little disappointed. Their religion has not worked out as they had hoped. And, though they would not like to put it into blunt words, in their heart of hearts they feel, and they know that they feel, that somehow Christ has not really implemented in their case the expectations that He raised in them. Sometimes they lay their actual experience side by side with the glory of the promises as they lie there plain for all to see; and in comparison with all their sheen, the former looks how drab and dull and unimpressive, makes but a poor match, shows little of the splendour of the original colours. And that puzzles them. That is what I was promised, and yet this tashed thing is all I have received. And they feel more than a little daunted, or perhaps it is aggrieved, or else it may be shaken and half afraid.

All these tremendous metaphors that tell of cataclysm and earthquake tumbling the strongest evils into sudden ruin, and those that speak with such assurance of glorious kingdoms won, and signal victories gained, and steady triumph heaped on triumph, all that seems to come out of another world than that in which their life, uneventfully familiar, creeps on placidly among the low sand-dunes and flatness of the usual infirmities and failings. Is it all just poetry, of which one does not look for literal fulfilment? Or, if not, why is there not far more to show? For if anything really momentous is ever to happen, is it not time that it should get begun?

Gibbon tells us that one day when in the full splendour

of his powers, Reynolds was shown some of his very early pictures, and that he declared that they made him feel abashed and humbled. I had thought, he said, that after all these years of toil and effort I must have made much more advance than I have done. So, life is running out; and Christ's ingenious grace keeps playing on us constantly, and all the elaborate machinery of the discipline of things, sunshine and shadow, joy and sorrow, is at work on us day after day, and we, too, are abashed and humbled that much more has not come of it, feel uneasily we must have let our chances slip, that we are not getting from Christ anything like all that He has to give us, are in short a little disappointed with the way in which it has worked out in us so far.

Well, if the facts be really as we say, and it has been as resultless as all that, were it not well to consider the question whether we have been fulfilling the required condition? No one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. But then, as Coleridge warned us, it is one thing to believe, and quite another merely to believe that we believe. It is common enough to be drawn to Christ; and, though we can't be bothered bestirring ourselves much to secure it, to feel in a lazy kind of way that we would like to grow into His nature, and put on His ways. But that is not believing, although we may think it is, is by far too indefinite a mood to allow Christ His opportunity. And we had better pull ourselves up sharply, and consider where we are. Our Lord warns us very solemnly that the Day of Judgment will be one of stupendous surprises for most people. Again and again He underlines for us the importance, the necessity at times, of practising a grave and searching self-examination, lest we be passing life in a mere bodiless and insubstantial dream, from which there must be a grim awakening. All the great masters of all the religions keep laying stress on that. And surely it is common sense. "Every evening," says Al Ghazzali, "I examine to see whether I have gained or lost in spiritual capital."

And yet this art of spiritual stocktaking is a delicate one, which must be carried through with caution, or else we may so mishandle it that, far from being the better of it, we may open the door to a whole flood of teasing, spiritual ailments, and grow nervous and jumpy and neurotic in our souls, trying ourselves perhaps by some unwise test, such as our own feelings, which come and go inexplicably, or can often be traced back to nothing higher than one's physical health, or even to the weather; or by our emotions, imagining complacently that all is well if we are touched and warm, and agitatedly that everything is lost, if these tides ebb a little for a while; or by our progress day by day, of which we are not always capable judges, having too limited a field of vision, like a private at the Front who was apt to forget that the run of things in his particular section need not determine accurately how the fortunes of the day were falling out for the line as a whole. Does not all that kind of thing mean, in the last resort, that we are forgetting the whole basis on which our religion is built up—that we are poor creatures who require to be saved? "Strength," says Dale, "is never in any true sense ours; we are but streams from the Eternal Fountain. It is the consciousness of the fulness of the fountain that gives us courage. But we are all, I suppose, inclined to wish to be lakes—or, at least, little pools—with waters of our own to be conceited about."

Still, if we are Christian folk at all, self-examination brings to light very much more than what may disconcert and take aback, must surely force us into amazed thanksgiving and praise. We may be disappointed with ourselves; but Christ has more than justified, and that to us, all that He ever said! Our faith may be an insecure and brittle thing; but have we not proved that His faithfulness is as steadfast even as He promised? Our love to Him has tides that flow and ebb, leaving at times only bare, ugly mud-flats in our empty hearts; but His to us is always at the full. Hasn't Christ in your actual experience of Him far surpassed

even His promises ? So the bewildered people of the Testa ment constantly found, and had to keep enlarging even their stupendous thoughts of Him. For always He kept overflowing, bursting, sweeping away even the most daring of them as fast as they could fashion them, proving them, too, in turn, pathetically inadequate.

They went to Him in prayer : and He gave, not indeed always what they had wished, but something infinitely better ; gave, they said gaspingly, stunned by the scale He uses, " above all that they could ask or think." They had their gallant dreams and hopes that looked to others much too venturesome ; and yet they found that even the most audacious of them was but a shadow of God's enormous liberality to us in Christ. " What never entered the mind of man, God has prepared all that for them who love Him, and has revealed it to us." They had been sure that He would help them, more or less ; but, to their own surprise, they proved that through Him they could do, not simply somewhat better, but " all things," even the most impossible.

And so, surely, it has been and is with us. We knew from the Gospels that this is a wonderful Master. But, having read them all with care, had you even begun to take it in from them that He is anything like as patient and forbearing and forgiving as He has proved Himself in your experience of Him ? We judged that the life He offers is by far better than any other. But had you realized until you tried how vastly better it is to be clean instead of soiled ; and hale and healthy-minded, rather than diseased in soul ; and free and one's own master, not wretchedly slinking in to heel at the first domineering call of some bullying sin ? Disappointed ! One who has known civilization may become at home among crude savages ; and one brought up in all the myriad beauties of nature's lavishness in some glorious land may grow content with the long dark and bitter cold of Arctic places. But one who has known Jesus Christ just could not live without Him.

So much we know. Yet we ourselves have small idea of our riches, and the enormous difference that Christ has made for us. Is it not pitiful to watch how those, more or less without, leap at the merest crumb that falls from our full table, exulting over it as an incredibly glorious discovery, greedily feeding their starved souls on some little fragment of the truth which is all ours ; like even Carlyle when, that night under the stars, a vague half-feeling of immortality awoke in him. " What if some of us at least may be permitted to go on still farther ! " " I have not had such a feeling for many years," he says, grew quite excited over it, ran in and had to set it down, marking that as a notable day. And yet he had caught for a moment only a far-off, transient, watery glimmer of the happy faith in which Church people always live, and that is woven into all their thinking. It is a marvellous privilege to be a Christian—yes, even a sorry and most stumbling one !

" What makes me even the kind of Christian that I am is that I dare not turn my back on Jesus and put Him out of my life," wrote Denney. And who that ever knew Him, even a little, could be guilty of that imbecility ? When Christ challenges us with the old question, " Will ye also go away ? " what can we do but blurt out the old answer, " To whom can we go ? " It is in Thee that we have found all that gives life its highest glory and its fullest splendour, and without Thee it were parched and dry ! No, Paul is right. Our faith has been half-hearted, puny, hardly worth the offering ; yet, even we, who have really shirked the required condition, have found, we too, that no one who believes in Christ is ever disappointed.

And if some of us have a sore fight of it, if life is difficult, and their road hot and steep, if every day asks from them just a little more than they have strength to give, if all their efforts, all their prayers, all their believing appear, Christ or no Christ, to have strangely small result, have you ever, when reading an exciting tale in which the hero seemed so

hopelessly entangled that escape looked impossible, yielded to an itching curiosity that could not wait, but had to peep at the last page to find how it all ends ? In the New Testament, when people become tired, depressed, dispirited, they often so indulge them, turn the fluttering pages of their life, and show them the last scene. Sometimes they stand at the grave's yawning edge and mock at it, yes, even as they lower their dearest into it. Sometimes they show the end of the long uphill road, and a tired, dusty, foot-sore traveller at last arriving there. It has worked out then, has come really true ; and the far-off impossible promises have grown into the only facts ! Sometimes it is the Day of Judgment, and we are standing forth there all alone in that tense, fearsome stillness, like a breath caught and held ; the dreadful books are open ; conscience keeps thundering out its long monotonous, merciless indictment ; and then Christ speaks, " I can find nothing in this life that at this stage I could desire away," He says, and His eyes light with pleasure. " Well done ! " He cries admiringly, and again, " Well done ! "—to you. " To present you holy and unblamable and unreprovable in His sight." That is His purpose toward you ; and not less than that what will most surely come of it, if " you continue in the faith, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel."

For the rest, they are content to leave things vague, or at least to drop little more than appetizing hints. There will be rest for tired folk, they are sure ; and glorious service for the willing ; and a dear home for all. And as they listen, they can hear the song of hearts so happy that they cannot keep from singing, and the shout of conquerors whose battles are all done.

But always they come back contentedly to this of it—they are with Christ ; and to know that is in itself sufficient, means everything, sets their hearts thrilling in a happy anticipation that can hardly bear to wait. " Doth not death fright you ? " demands Bosola, the villain, in the play. " Who

would be afraid on't," answers the woman, facing it quite close, "knowing to meet such excellent company in the other world!" They are with Christ. And one day you, too, shall be with Him, shall be like Him, very you! That is the certain end of it for those whose faith and courage hold. Aristotle lays it down, says Tauler, "that God and nature are not unprofitable workers, but what they work at they carry to its end. And God created man that He might have pleasure in him." No one who trusts in Christ will stand at last, white-faced and cold at heart, with his life over, and his dreams all out, and his hope gone and proved only a mockery. The future may be dark and hidden, the road may be long and steep; there may be much to face, and much to bear. But one thing these men know, have proved, and build on it with absolute assurance. "No one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. No one." No, not you!

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